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## THE BLACK DROP



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# THE BLACK DROP

BY

ALICE BROWN

AUTHOR OF

"THE PRISONER," "BROMLEY NEIGHBORHOOD," ETC.

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1919

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THE BLACK DROP





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## I

SINCE the war has knocked out from under us the foundations of old conformities, it is difficult to decide whether to write the story of those men and women who walk the pages of that reality called fiction before 1914 or after. For they would be found, if they are malleable enough to be worth writing about at all, distinctly different people before and after that date. This story is about the Tracys, and the Tracys, when the world fell apart and tried to weld itself together again, were not the Tracys who were acted on by the catastrophe and the welding process. They often looked back, individuals of the family, at their old selves of a few years ago and felt, in a dazed groping, that such Tracys weren't recognizable by present standards. Then they had been at ease in a secure prosperity, living delightfully at Grasslands, their inherited estate on the Massachusetts coast, and able to spend an occasional month in New York or Boston, or the more aggressive springs in Florida. Norris, the father of the family, who wrote novels much respected by the intellectual upper class and compiled textbooks that brought in an absurd income for the amount of live interest he put into them, was sagging a little toward the least picturesque attitude of middle life. He had not done what youth had led him to believe he might do. He had neither tapped the

Muses' fount nor held a mirror up to nature with any distinctive brilliancy, and at times he felt this bitterly. But the bitterness came less and less frequently, as he went further into the doldrums of physical moderation, and he realized, with a wry humor of acquiescence, that some day it would cease to come at all. Then he would be old, and in that he would again acquiesce until the tide of life ebbed and ebbed, still gently and inexorably, and he would be dead. But he knew all the great calls upon him, whether he had answered them adequately or not, had pretty well ceased. He had worked and loved. There was the end of it. Whatever life, the deceptive taskmistress who is always offering lures for her own hidden ends, might want done now, she would thrust into younger hands.

In October, 1916, the family moved up to Boston and they had been there a week before Charles, the eldest son, married and living within an easy walking mile, had come to see them. Charles had bought the house at the West End and offered it to them rent free, reminding them they had not left Grasslands in two years, and it was time they did. It wasn't going to do the Allies any good, he said, for them to stay down there, economising and stewing about things that weren't their business anyway, only to make bandages and send stuff over to France. We'd got to go on living, whatever happened to France. Business as usual was the only sane slogan, and if we lived up to that we should find ourselves in a position to help the Allies out when the infernal muddle was cleared up. If we didn't, we should be as deep in the soup as they were now. His father listened to him, opened his mouth, shut it again, was glad John, the other son, wasn't there to hear, since he was only too ready to get up a scrap with Charles (which really didn't do any good in the end because

Charles wasn't to be moved by scrapping) and said mildly Charles might be right about a winter in town and they'd think it over. And it proved on consultation that Emily, his wife, agreed with him, though it would have taken all the domestic gods in conclave to decide whether she did this of her own free will or because she thought he wanted it. Norris refused his son's gift of the lease because, when he had known anything actual about Charles's affairs, they were always in a precarious state of flux; and so Charles compromised on a nominal rental. And when the family, after a fleeting glimpse at the house by Norris and his younger son, John, had come up with the servants, whose faithfulness took back to an elder time, they found it of a rare perfection. It was an old house "on the hill" with a view of the Charles and an oblique pathway for the eye to green trees; and within, though it was undeniably shabby, this was the shabbiness of age and homely living. It looked as if it had suffered nothing from time, but simply coincided in the kindly use human beings had given it. It didn't seem like a house the Tracys had hired, but one they had inherited and of which they knew the backward steps from age to youth. It had all the concomitants of beauty in a building of the right period: shutters, wainscoting, open fireplaces of a dulled and mellowed brick and generous hearths. It was fittingly provided with beautiful furniture of an antique type, and the general harmony of the whole thing, like "the marriage of true minds," enabled them to settle with an amazing lack of difficulty.

Why had they come up from Grasslands where Norris had been so snugly fitted in for his entire lifetime, writing his schoolbooks which earned him money and his novels which didn't, that his neighbors would have said you

couldn't pry him out for more than a flitting, here or there? Why, except that Charles had urged them to it? Norris, after he forgot Charles was urging, gave himself plausible reason for it. John, the second son — curt name for a handsome blonde youth with a dashing profile line and a limp that kept him from robust pursuits — was on fire with eagerness to do something tremendous for the war, and there was nothing he could do adequate to his desires. He, like his father, had a knack at words. They'd got to serve him for weapons since the limp and the recurrent pain of it held him down and was going to hold him, he was told, all his mortal days. He began writing, fiery things, advisory, beseeching things, and got them in wherever he could, sometimes as letters only. And while he fumed at the war, his father grew gray over it and said one night to his wife in the moon-lighted splendor of their room at Grasslands — a chamber of care now, since Europe was on fire, dear shrines destroyed, dear heart of England aching:

“Emily, what if we should move up to town?”

You could hardly ever tell what Emily was thinking. She had lived that effective masquerade of woman's service to men and houses for over thirty years now, and Norris knew he didn't easily find out what she wanted done — only what she thought best should be done. And now, in their moon-lighted seclusion, he was at once aware he had taken the wrong time and setting to interrogate her. He couldn't even see her face, smooth, sympathetic mask as it was of her yieldingness and earnest foresight for the family good. The moonlight had blotted her out, as effectually as darkness. There she was, her hair a shadow and her face an outline merely, drowned on her pillow. But after all, he told himself, if he had put the question

by day, and tried to strike out some spark of her personal will or liking, he wouldn't have succeeded. She answered him at once:

“You mean on account of John?”

Now he hadn't at all meant on account of John, but he seized upon it as a more or less valid pretext.

“Don't you think yourself,” he said, “John would make better headway if he could be in town, chum in with other fellows and perhaps get a job on a paper?”

“Yes,” she said. “It isn't quite the same, living down here and going up every week.”

They said no more that night. He judged it best to let her think it over; and besides he was so enamored of giving a simple reason for a complex motive that he wanted to think that over, too. He had his own private sense of humor that nobody, except his father perhaps, a man really old and crippled by gout, ever tapped. What was the reason he wanted to move away from Grasslands? Was it because Charles had suggested it, had made the practical detail of it easy and set the pace of their preparation? Not at all, he would have said. The truth was that the family pretty well had forgotten which among them had really suggested it. That was the way with Charles's projects. He never hurled them at you with an impact that knocked you down and a directness that told you the path they came. He was the cleverest of propagandists. You might be reading a book that set you the recipe for getting your own dear wishes, and Charles would come noiselessly up and slip another bit of paper over the printed page, and smile at you when you frowned and reminded him you were reading. And you always went back to the slip of paper, and you always found it contained something Charles wanted you to do, to the exclusion of

what you had determined on doing yourself. And the artful beauty of it was that, after he had persuaded you to do it, he always dropped out of the matter, so that you were left with the saving certainty that you had made your decision unaided and in accordance with intimate reasons nobody could possibly have furnished you.

Norris Tracy, well as he knew the elusive art of Charles, had fallen back upon his own reasons for getting away, and they were sufficiently cogent. He wanted, at this time of the world's agony, the nearness of his kind. The war had first roused him, then lashed and beaten him; he was sore all over. The accustomed comforts of a careless life, which he, like his neighbors, had once lived as if the hell of poverty and the hell of terror beyond their borders were non-existent, were dreadful to him and bread was bitter in his mouth. And like thousands in America in those first years of the war when there was nothing but palliatives to offer a world in flames, bandages and money and words — better than no offering at all, yet terrible in their inefficacy — he was going wild over his own inaction. And the great spaces of the country, even the faithful stars at night, reproached him with a beauty he could not attain unto because he and his countrymen were living in the little house of world-poverty instead of the chosen halls of a rich abnegation. And as it is when a forest fire drives all the beasts of the wild together in a headlong rush for life, hereditary foe with foe, herded in a common danger, he felt, in this conflagration of the world, he must join the stampede. But Emily, he thought, wouldn't suspect that. Let her judge the case on the merits of an apparent reason.

Next morning after breakfast he went up to his father's room, where the old man, living in a state of ironic patience toward death and life also, would have risen early to sit in



stark misery, a rug spread over his gouty legs. There he was at his table, the beautiful old man, his fine thin face touched with a patent scorn as if he expected the world and all its humbler men to be his servitors, and yet was scornful, Norris knew, only of his gout and the pains that were never going to make him wince outwardly. He was holding the morning paper before him in his fine white hands — and even the hands, Norris knew, his father hated because they had grown delicate from disuse and age. This was a man who had loved the life of the body and the growing things of earth. He had been the able manager of a mill and made his money from it, and set out the orchards of Grasslands and grafted the trees. And now he was waiting in a proud immobility, like the Roman senators in their ivory chairs, for the coming of the foe — only the enemy he awaited was death, and the forerunner of death was already at his muscles, stiffening them with beastly pains, and these, too, he defied. He laid down his paper, as Norris came in, and took off his glasses, holding them in one hand and gesticulating with them in an unconsidered way. The two were alike, yet unlike, father and son, Norris with the same fine line of nose and brow, though he was neutral in his coloring and his father's white hair had once been black. Norris began abruptly, not by asking how his father was, for that was tacitly discouraged, but with his question:

“Father, what should you say to taking a house in Boston and moving up there, the whole push?”

Grandsir — for he was called so ordinarily in the house — did not hesitate a second.

“Yes,” said he, “you’ve hit it. For God’s sake, do it and do it now. We shall all go crazy down here watching for the papers and balancing Washington and Germany and

trying to say the things we don't believe because it's for the country's stability. Yes, take a house. If it's on a car line so much the better. Let's have some noise. Let's see people going by. Norris, last night there was a great blue star — blue as steel and fire it was — that stared at me through that window, and if I hadn't been so stiff I'd have got out of bed and taken a shot at it."

"I know that star," said Norris. He knew his father, too. His father didn't have to translate himself for him. "It's been saying some queer things."

"They've no business to stare in at the window," said the old man, "and say such things to us when we can't shoulder a musket and go. Yes, you take a house, Norris. What does Emily say?"

Norris smiled at him in a knowing silence. He and his father never exchanged any confidences about Emily, but he fancied grandsir knew well enough how she paced soberly along over the domestic surface of things. And as he sat looking at his father the resemblance between them and the difference would have been vivid to a keen observer. Norris had as fine a face perhaps and the line of profile was almost exactly the same. But there was no scorn in it — he had not yet been called on to give up his activities and seat himself in the ivory chair — only a wistful, tender sort of look not often seen in men without an alloy of weakness. And he was wearied now, wearied almost to the death of all unreasoning hopes and certainties.

"She thinks," he said, "it'll be good for John."

"Oh," said the old man, "John. Well, John could keep on going up, I suppose, without moving the whole family. He could get himself some sort of a roosting place."

"Yes," said Norris, with a kindly concession to Emily's point of view, "only that's the way it strikes her."

The old man looked at him with the slightest smile that Norris, with some surprise, thought rather satirical; but he didn't speak. And Norris couldn't ask him what it meant. It was a point of honor not to ask grandsir anything personal, now he had such miseries to combat. But we may know, through the omniscience of the onlooker, that grandsir was really thinking there were things about Emily that Norris, clever as he was with his unpopular novels and his productive schoolbooks, didn't know at all.

Later in the day Emily came in to ask grandsir if she might put a plant in his window because he got the first sun. She never asked him if he wanted this or that or how he felt, and now while she disposed the plant with an anxious care, as if one inch to the right or left would affect its well-being, he gazed at her with an amused but wholly affectionate smile. She was a slender woman of quick movements, a thin face that somehow suggested an admirable bony structure underneath, and sanguine colored hair parted and put back smoothly, but so thick and with such a life in it that you felt it couldn't be governed entirely by masterly hands or the most determined pins. Her expression — that is difficult to qualify. It was interrogative and yet of itself dumb. You felt she wanted to know a great many things about life, but, for reasons of her own, had found it wise to tell nothing. She was not secretive; only the wisdom of events had not been made plain to her, and she couldn't express her own conclusions until she knew more about the whole business of being than she was likely to find out by asking. And besides, she couldn't ask; even a question might upset the balance of issues in the domestic world. When she had disposed the

plant to an exacting ideal, she turned and paused an instant looking at grandsir with her slight wavering smile that was little more than a tremulous change in the contour of the mouth. She wasn't going to challenge any emotion you hadn't been predisposed to, only she did want you to see she felt gently toward you. Grandsir often saw she had these instants of unobtrusive waiting after she had finished a task in his room; they were meant to give him a chance to speak more fully to her.

"Well," said he, "I judge you think it's better for Norris to move in town for the winter."

She knew perfectly well that Norris must have said she thought it better for John. That was all he could tell, for it was all he knew. But grandsir had pierced the surface of the apparent — the accepted — to the truth within her. He always did that, and there was no sense in combating him, because indubitably he knew. And she did not want to sift and perhaps smother his knowledge. This room was the one clear spot in the house where she could answer yes and no without regard to the expediency of things.

"Yes," she said. "He's taking the war pretty hard."

"What's Charles say about it?"

"Oh," said Emily, "he wants us to do it — wants it ever so much, I judged."

"Why does he?"

"I don't know."

She stood there folding a little green leaf over and over, gazing at it absorbedly as if her interest lay in the folding. Then she recalled herself, looked up at grandsir with an actual smile now, a brightness that always warmed him in a pronounced implication of good feeling between them, and went away about her tasks.

And now the Tracys were settled in the new house,

grandsir in an upper room, according, as he said, to the ironies of life, whereby it is decreed that they who have no legs shall be given stairs to climb. Norris remonstrated strongly: if father were on the second floor he would, said Norris, be so much nearer them all. But Emily didn't consider that for an instant. Even while he proved his point, she was making grandsir's bed up there where he wanted it to be. He didn't like contiguity to that intricate turmoil which is called life. He wanted to dwell in a circle of stillness with his past and the approaching phantom of the future, no more mysterious. And when it had been a week and Charles, the eldest son, hadn't come and Helen his wife didn't even telephone, Charles appeared, on an early evening, announcing that he had been in Washington and just got back. His mother, hearing his voice, left the dinner table and went into the hall to meet him, and there, before taking off his coat, he enveloped her in a hug and asked:

“How's everybody?”

Perhaps she didn't really answer, for he never waited for answers and this she knew; and at the same moment he had taken her arm and was convoying her back to the dining-room. And there he sat down at a corner of the table and said Yes, he would have coffee. He was off his feed a little lately. He'd dropped about fifteen pounds, — worry, he guessed. And then he laughed his infectious laugh. Norris looked up at him with the mildly questioning glance he always gave him after absence, when he had time to forget just how Charles looked. Charles “took back” to a seventeenth century ancestor who was sallow and lean with a heavy brow and small eyes and an obstinate chin. Norris had a portrait, atrociously painted, of that ancestor, and whenever he saw it — for it

hung in the shadows of a dark hall at Grasslands and the family, with relief unspoken, had left it behind them — he thought how appropriate the face would be for a witch-burning, man-hanging judge; and sometimes when Charles's face came on him suddenly he wondered whether Charles also wasn't of the type of an obstinate bully who needed only opportunity to do strange deeds to the lives of men. For Charles had other subtle devices than those which served him in family diplomacy. He was always piping the ground to carry his purposes a long, long way. You saw nothing on the surface; but when something happened, irrationally to his advantage, you could follow back the underground communication and satisfy yourself that it wasn't blind fortune which had showered him with a new prosperity. It was Charles himself. Once Norris had broken out to his father and disclosed his total failure to reconcile the inner deficiencies of Charles with his unfailing mastery over the means of life.

"That's easy," grandsir had said. "Charles is a politician."

He could talk, and so clever was he in the ways of the politician that he could even get people to talk for him. Now he sat drinking his coffee and asking questions to which he expected no answer — because he wasn't going to give the time for them — and nobody attempted any. They knew Charles. Did they like the house? Best house of the period in Boston. This, they were aware, wasn't so, for there were many houses as faithful and far prouder; but it didn't pay to bring him down to exactitudes. You could keep qualifying what he said, in your own mind, as he went on, and that was far easier than rousing flat disclaimers. There they were, the four, father and mother and two sons, three of them on the same plane of temperate



assertion and Charles the rank outsider. Norris, when he got space, replied in a pleasant moderation. Yes, they liked the house enormously. They felt already at home. Father did, too. He was dining upstairs. No, his gout wasn't any better, though it was difficult to tell. He persisted in making a joke of it. But it presently became apparent that Charles was uneasy. Through the fusillade of his questioning he seemed to be keeping them all under a glancing inspection. Emily saw that. She wondered what he wanted to know. And presently he turned to his brother who was eating apples steadily — he had a plate of them at hand and was devouring them with a regular placidity only equalled by his interest in them — and asked:

“Any idea what you're going to do?”

## II

JOHN was just finishing the trisecting of a McIntosh Red. He cut it laterally and ate the resultant wheels with a grave precision.

“Do?” said he. “What do you mean — do?”

“Why,” said Charles, “I s’pose you’re going to get into some sort of newspaper work now you’re up here for good.”

“I’ve been up here most of the time right along,” said John. “It’s the family that’s here for good.”

He always had a period, for which he couldn’t account, when he and Charles met after absence, of getting used to him. It wasn’t that Charles offensively did the elder brother act; but they were so fundamentally different in everything that John felt a distinct shock at being shaken up in the family bag again with this temperamentally foreign stranger who yet had indubitable rights of familiar speech toward him. Now Emily rose from the table and they followed her to the sitting-room where a fire of maple wood, abundant and gaily bright, was mulling in the big fireplace.

“Bet you brought up a van of wood with you,” said Charles, as if it were a sentimental folly, yet pardonable, and his mother said they had.

They sat down before the compelling blaze that offered all sorts of urgently conciliatory things about the unity and warmth of family life, and Charles and his father lit

up, and John, who had brought more apples in his pocket, bit and munched reflectively. But Charles hadn't done with him.

"That's a queer crowd you run with," he said, between puffs.

John wasn't disconcerted.

"Lame ducks," he said. "That what you mean? How do you know I run with 'em?"

"Because you're all harping on the same note. I can't take up a paper but I find some of you."

"We are pitching into things, if that's what you mean," said John, biting his apple.

He had made it a rule that Charles should never disturb him. It had become a point of pride ever since a disgraceful day, at least ten years ago, when he had been so sick with anger at what he felt was a beastliness of Charles that it had made him tremulous and lost him his voice. For one horrible instant he had thought he was going to cry; but at that point Charles had laughed, and it saved him. Thenceforth, in these fraternal onsets, no diplomat had ever been more resolved on an unmoved exterior. The two brothers had each a diplomacy of his own, John's as innocent as the protective coloring in the insect world.

"What do you mean by lame ducks?" Charles was asking now.

"Oh," said John, tossing his core into the fire with a finality that said you couldn't possibly tempt him to eat an eighth apple, "we are, you know. I'm lame, Finch can't see an inch before his nose, Brennan's on the verge of T. B. and has to be sent off and buried in a camp twenty-four hours after he runs away and comes back to life, and Bailey's got a queer heart. Besides, he's a skeleton. We

can't any of us go over to France and pitch in. All we can do is to stay here — and talk."

The moderation of his voice held to the last word. Not even for the luxury of indulging dear indignations would he betray himself to Charles. And he did hate talk that was not the foil of the gallant deed.

"You talk too much," said Charles.

"Oh, come now," said Norris peacefully, "they're doing some mighty good work. That poem of John's in the *Eagle* — it's as good as any of those English fellows have done — except Owen Seaman, that is. He's the boy for me, inexhaustible, turning the trick every time, and with a laugh, — how can he do it? — with a laugh."

"That's all right," said Charles. "But England's at war. She's in it. We're not. And John and his gang are simply whipping up militarism. It's outrageous."

John sat perfectly still, only, his mother saw, as she stole a look at him, the color had mounted to his face and dyed it to his hair. She wasn't afraid he would respond intemperately. Long ago she had fathomed his diplomatic determination and she read, like a page in a familiar tongue, the meaning of the surging blood. He was thinking rather well of himself and his lame ducks if Charles could say they had the influence to warrant irritation. It was Norris who found himself goaded into speech.

"But, good God!" he said. "What other decent thing is there for a man to do?"

"Oh, well! well!" said Charles. He got up and kicked a log into place, — the wrong place, Emily, who was expert with logs, uncomplainingly noted — and then sat down again, as if by that act the discussion closed.

"How is Helen?" his mother asked him, which was her contribution to general amity.

Immediately he fell into the gloom indicated by corrugated eyebrows and a long drawn breath. He had finished his cigar, and now plunged his hands deep in his pockets and pushed back his chair so that he could attain the greater ease of stretching his legs out straight toward the fire.

"That's it," said he, "that's really what I came round for — except to say howdy," he concluded, with a tardy recognition of family claims.

"She's all right, isn't she?" Emily asked quickly.

"Oh, yes, she's all right, health's all right. But the fact is, things haven't been going well."

"Money?" asked Norris. "If it's that, you ought never to have jumped in and bought this house."

"Don't you worry," said Charles. He smiled on them with the air of one who had nothing to learn from older heads which had presumably lost some sapience while his own was steadily gaining. "I never was so well fixed in my life, never saw so much ahead of me. But Helen — well, the fact is, she's discontented."

"Maybe she wants a little trip," said Emily. "Why didn't you take her to Washington?"

"Washington nothing," said Charles violently. "No, and I didn't ask her. I'd known mighty well what answer I'd got if I had. She's contrary as the devil. No, mother, I can't put it any other way. She's discontented, that's the root of it, discontented."

"With you?" John asked — like a fool, he instantly told himself. For he was bent on being a sport, and, if he had determined not to let his brother ruffle him to omit all counter ruffling. But this was so pat, so inevitable, it slipped out and he sat up, alert, in surprise at the response it brought.

"Well," said Charles, pushing his hands further into his pockets and stretching his legs to such length that he seemed to be lying flat in his chair, "that's the long and short of it. With me."

Then there was the silence of a shocked moment during which the wedded mind of two of the hearers sought about and waved the antennæ of supposition in a vague search for the cause of Helen's discontent. Charles himself was enough, each thought in that arcanum where the perceptive faculties carry on a perpetual tribunal; but Charles was no different in the main from what he had been five years before when he was irresistibly in love with Helen and had rushed her into being in love with him. He was only "more so," as to the turbulent activities of his life. If Helen could admit him then to the sanctities of marriage, why couldn't she endure his permanent foothold there? She could hardly think worse of Charles — the surface of him — each ruthless mind was saying, than the family did; and the family hadn't thrown him over. Why should Helen be disturbing social balances with her discontents?

"Mother," said Charles, "I wish you'd talk to her."

"If she gives me an opening," said Emily. "If she doesn't, I couldn't possibly. I shouldn't know what to say."

"Why don't you tell the whole business?" said Norris testily. "That is, if it's anything you *can* tell. And I gather it is, or you wouldn't have begun on it."

"Oh, it'll come out. Don't you worry," said Charles gloomily. "You'll see it in the headlines, if she can't be choked off somehow. She's going to file proceedings for divorce."

"What!" the word leaped from Norris's lips with the force of a cry.



Emily said nothing. She sat looking into the fire, but John saw her hand tighten on the arm of her chair. As for him, such a sense of shame came over him as he had never recognized. He loved Helen, in a timid way. He thought of her as a beautiful person who had inexplicably been chained up in a dreadful castle which was, no doubt, the castle of his brother's delight. But what had it been for her? And now the quick sense of shame told him she was escaping from the castle, but, to get through the window, she had to do it naked, as it were, to the eyes of men. Her name and all the intimacies of her life had to be on wagging tongues, and his sorrow for her was tinged with the bitterness of youth.

"Then," Norris concluded remorselessly, "you've given her cause."

"She's as wrong-headed as the devil," said Charles peevishly. "You never saw a woman so changed. You wouldn't know her. I shouldn't — if I ever saw her."

"If you ever saw her?" repeated Emily. "Why, where is she?"

"She's left my bed and board." And now they did read in him, not anger alone, but an extreme of mortification. "She's round the corner here, half way up the hill, she and her sister Jessie."

"Is Jessie here?" Emily asked, stupidly, she thought at once, for he had told her.

"Yes. Jessie'd gone to France. She's always been a disgrace, ever since that aunt died she lived with in New York. Acted as if a girl of twenty could go bumming round the country like a man. She went on a paper first, you know, that woman's paper. But when the war begun she threw that up and went over to France. You couldn't stop her. I don't know what she did, relief work, some sort."

"I never knew whether Helen upheld her in that," said Norris.

"I don't know myself. I never brought it up with Helen. I thought if Jessie was choked off there the alternative might be her coming to live with us, and I'd had enough of that the first three months we were married. They've been sly as the devil, she and Helen, both of them. I didn't know anything was going on till Helen called me into the library one day and read the riot act, and then off she goes to a hotel, in New York somewhere, up state. And by the time I'd located her, Jessie was back from France and they'd taken the apartment I spoke of and that's all there was to it. Helen had simply told the servants some yarn of being called away and — beat it."

John broke into a little laugh, instantly suppressed. It was Charles's last verb, so curiously inept as applied to Helen.

"Didn't you try to see her?" Emily inquired.

Her tone was absolutely colorless, but John, glancing at her, thought mother was moved at last.

"See her?" Charles almost bellowed, in a sudden outburst of rage that told its own story. He was really, they were silently agreeing, feeling it very deeply. "Of course I did. I went round there the morning she moved in."

"Well," Emily asked, "what did she say?"

"Wouldn't see me. Sent word by Jessie she'd said all she'd got to say."

"Well," said Emily absently — her actual mind seemed to be with the two sisters in the apartment round the corner — "that must have been hard for Jessie."

"Hard for Jessie? I'd make it hard for Jessie. Why didn't she stay where she was put, and not come here worming herself in between husband and wife?"

“Well?” said Norris. It evidently meant, “What did you do then?”

“I had to communicate with her through Jessie, like a damned criminal,” said Charles, in no assumed disgust. “But I managed to get them to say she wouldn’t do anything — definite, you know — till I got back. I was due in Washington next day, and I represented to ’em they’d no business to spring a thing like that on me — take an unfair advantage —”

“So she hasn’t actually done anything yet,” said Emily. “I mean, taken any steps — except leaving you?”

“No, she hasn’t taken any legal steps, if that’s what you mean. That is, I assume so. And that’s where you come in. You’ve got to talk to her. You’ve got to get her to quash the whole thing.”

“Now look here,” said Norris, “you’re not going to bring your mother into this business. I won’t have it, Charles. I tell you plainly I won’t have it.”

“Helen sets her life by you,” said Charles, ignoring his father and using the homely old country phrase that moved his mother, it gave him, for the instant, such sincerity. “If she’ll listen to anybody, she’ll listen to you. I don’t know as there’s anybody else she’d listen to, except that damned mischief-making Jessie and she’s on her side.”

Emily did not speak, and John, against his resolution, came out bluntly:

“How do you know which side mother’s on, or which side she’ll be on after she sees Helen?”

“I’ll tell you which side she’s got to be on,” said Charles. His face had darkened under the scowl it wore when events didn’t go to suit him and he was angrily determined to make them. “She’s got to be on my side. So have all of you. If you won’t because it’ll be the devil and all to see

your names in the headlines and have reporters butting in morning, noon and night, you'll do it because it's my gamble."

"What's your gamble?" his father asked.

"I'm onto something big, that's all," said Charles. He looked a man of power as he spoke, not merely of a physical force, but darkly bent on what had got to yield. "It'll bring me into prominence — it'll make me. That's it. I shall be made."

"Money?" asked his father quietly.

"Money, yes. And more than money. Whichever way the country goes — and she can't go into war, and you'd better stop harping on that string, John, if you know what's good for all of us — if I play my cards decently, I'm made."

"Yes," said Norris, still quietly, "that's the point — play them decently."

"Oh, I don't mean that," said Charles, in an angry rebuttal. "I mean if I watch out I'm sure to come into something big."

"An appointment?" inquired his father.

"Call it anything you like. And if I've got to figure in a divorce trial, I'm done for."

John quoted Shakespeare under his breath: "'Not to leave undone, but keep unknown.'"

"What?" Charles inquired irritably.

John did not respond. He got up and threw on another log.

"I can't," said Charles, floundering a little, "I can't have attention called to me, not in that way. Everything's above-board, in my career, so far as the rest of the world knows, and it's to be left so. Mother, you've got to talk to Helen."

"I want to see Helen," said his mother, with the neutrality that often maddened him. "Has she a telephone?"

"Yes. It's in her sister's name. So's the apartment, I suppose. They were mighty clever about it all, I can tell you."

"Oh," said his mother, "Jessie Lisle. Pretty name, isn't it? I *always* thought Helen's name was so pretty when you were engaged to her. You remember that first time you brought her home."

Charles got up with such sudden force that his chair seemed to resent it and ran away backward on indignant legs.

"I remember most things that have happened to me," he said. "It's a damned sell, life is. Do you think I ought to go up and see grandsir?"

"No. Oh, no," said Emily hastily. "He'll be busy with his reading."

Charles went into the hall, put on his coat and came back again, holding his hat and stick.

"You'll tell him, I s'pose," he remarked, looking at the fire and frowning.

Emily, noting his beautiful hands, the one that held his hat and the other his stick and gloves, thought, with a throb of mother pain, how wonderful they had always been to her, an index, she tried to believe, of the son she meant him to be.

"Yes," said Norris. "Of course we shall tell father."

"Helen's fond of him," Charles offered, this rather hesitatingly and so for a moment making himself more appealing to the collective family mind than through his sledge-hammer strokes. "He might be able to do something with her. It appears to me," he ended, in a bitterness that seemed to hold a mortification they had never

seen in him, "Helen's inclined to be fond of the whole family — except me."

With that he was gone, and they heard him shut the door violently with a muttered repudiation of doors in general because the chain swung out and got in his way. After he had been with them there was always a curious break in tension of the atmosphere. If he had been what his mother called good — and Charles's good was no less than charming — they with difficulty avoided looking at one another in thanksgiving over what they had received. It was, by contrast with what he might have been, incredible. And sometimes he was not good; and then his departure left them shaken to the inmost nerve. For there was really, John was convinced, though his mother would never let him enlarge on it, a devil in Charles.

Emily stood there staring at the fire, and Norris looked at her as if in reminder that he'd like to have her speak and interpret unto him.

"Well," said he, "was that the reason he was so anxious for us to come up here for the winter and why he settled on this house round the corner from Helen?"

"Oh," said Emily deprecatingly, "we were anxious enough to come."

"You've got yourself into it," said Norris, fuming. "That is, he got you into it. You going to telephone?"

"Why, of course," said his wife, with a look of perfect clarity. She seemed to jump the near-by ditch of discomfort and find herself safely on the ground of their old relations with the fugitive wife. "Of course I shouldn't come up here and not try to see Helen."

"You haven't tried," said Norris feebly, as if that were the issue.

“Well,” said she conclusively, “I think we must try now.”

She didn't say she had telephoned her son's house the day after their arrival and, having been told Mrs. Tracy was away indefinitely, gave up, because her guessing faculties warned her of something queer afoot.

“Come,” said Norris, “let's go and tell father.”

They turned like children running to call the higher intelligences to interpret unto them and went upstairs, John, though he had meant to be out that evening, rounding up his lame ducks, following on behind.



### III

GRANDSIR was sitting at his big table facing the door, and within the tract of soft illumination from the drop-light were large sheets of paper over which his pencil hovered. A frown, not of perplexity but of extreme interest, brought his fine brows together. He was debating whether he could allow himself to yield to his foolish passion for early apples, of which Grasslands had already such abundance that, although the neighbors were called in to pick and gather, the fragrance of fallen fruit, the cricket's quota, filled the air. Or should he smother his temptation to make the present venture one of personal delight and set out the winter dependables that denied the eye something of immediate fruition? But hearing steps he put down his pencil and laid the papers away. The smile born out of the sagacity of age — a smile of a satiric quality yet courteously patient — came over his face. He suspected the family of leaving their exigent pursuits to come up and keep him company, whereas he might be the better entertained without them. But Emily's face at once gave his conjectures another directing push, and his smile faded. The least anxiety on Emily's brow was enough to recall him to the temporal affairs he had, for the most part, stepped out of with a dignified finality and in ample time to avoid the tread of a younger generation on his heels.

"Writing, father?" asked Norris unnecessarily, and



John went at once to the fireplace and laid the sticks together.

"What is it?" asked grandsir, as they ceased their slight activities of pulling chairs into range of his table and disposing themselves. "Oh, I see! Charles was here."

"He asked if he might come up," Norris began, and his father raised his eyebrows slightly.

"No, of course not," he said to Emily, as if he knew who was responsible for sparing him the duty visit, "you were quite right. Helen come with him?"

"No," Emily returned, and now she looked directly at him and said by her glance — or he imagined she said — "If you and I could only talk this thing out!" Emily often seemed to be implying that, and yet they never did foregather for secret conclaves. It was only that she was apparently begging that form of solace and counsel, and he had a distinct belief that even in the wordless appeal there lay the assurance that she was relying on him.

"The fact is," Norris came in, and absolutely by way of helping Emily out from what he felt was a hateful position for her — she was sorry for Charles, sorry for Helen, and she was the last person to enter upon illicit topics with that timorous yet fearful joy not unknown to women — "Charles is in a hole. They've had some trouble, he and Helen. That's the way I understand it."

Grandsir avoided looking at Emily now. He didn't want to surprise her confidence and guess out of her what she may not have intended for him all in one piece. He kept his eyes on Norris, gravely, with a certain sternness even, as if he were probing him as a form of legal inquiry on which he or somebody had got to pass judgment.

"Well," said he, "what's the matter?"

In the second that Norris didn't answer John had time to feel they were drifting into a mawkish avoidance of the situation as it was, and he broke bluntly in:

"Helen's left him."

Both his father and mother turned to him as if they had suffered a sort of shock, and grandsir smiled, almost imperceptibly, it is true, but in a way that betrayed his own inward appreciation, even if it scarcely moved the muscles of his lips. Neither Norris nor his wife could have told why they shrank momentarily from John's incursion. It wasn't that they wanted to preserve a fiction of his innocence of social ironies and lapses, but rather, perhaps, because he and Charles inevitably wore two aspects to them: the incredibly grown-up one and the vanished innocence of the child. Emily, indeed, could fall back any time into a dreamy recurrence of that bygone period when she guided the two boys at their prayers and arithmetic; and it was, when inevitably waking from such returns to the past, and she found herself confronted by her men children that she felt herself momentarily a stranger to them. Grandsir was looking at John now in a responsive interest, as if he were the witness just sworn in.

"Oh," said he, "found him out, has she?"

"Yes," said John directly, "no doubt of it."

"Now what do you mean by that?" Norris demanded fractiously. He knew perfectly well what they meant, but he was answering out of his defensive position as father of the family. The family tradition must be preserved, even if it were, in this case, only a family fiction, and he had got to manage it to the extent of a false partisanship of Charles. "He's exactly what he always was. Helen knew what he was —"

"Oh, no, she didn't," said grandsir. "She was in love with him."

"Well," said Norris hardily, knowing he lied and should presently be brought to book, "same thing."

"Now, Norris," said grandsir, "what's the use of your writing novels if you can say a thing like that? It proves you don't know any more about life and the glamour of it when nature's got her paw on you than a baby two days old. You know it isn't so. You know how Charles looked to Helen when she first got acquainted with him. That brutality of his seemed to her the most astounding combination of god and tiger she'd ever met. And when she found things in him — the other things, the ones we know — she thought he adored her and she could make him over. Now, what's she left him for? Is it another woman?"

"Yes," said John, before the other two could speak, and again they looked at him amazedly.

"He tell you?" grandsir inquired.

"No," said Emily, "no. John, he didn't tell us anything of the sort."

"What are you saying such a thing as that for?" Norris inquired of his son.

"I've seen them together," said John. Now he spoke sullenly. He didn't want to turn informer, but the thought of Helen in her flight from the ogre's castle set his nerves to quivering and he saw Charles galloping after her, seizing her, it might be, by the hair of the head, and dragging her back to her dungeon and straw. That must be prevented. The family must get their eye on her, see whither the flight was leading, and be assembled to surround her in a guarding cohort.

"Where did you see her, John?" his mother was asking quietly.

"I've seen 'em a lot," said John, with a young stolidity. He was in for it now, and he resolved he wouldn't play the boy and damage Helen's cause either by the intemperance of his defence or by its weakness. "At the theatre, walking together, driving. She's got a car."

"Who is she?" grandsir asked, but John understood he meant, "Is she inside the conventions where Helen lives and your mother and the other women whose names we securely use?"

"She does newspaper work, of a sort," he answered. "Some of our fellows know her."

"Our fellows?" grandsir asked. "Your fellows?"

"The fellows I know," said John. "Writing, one sort or another, fellows like me. It's easy enough to know her. She's a great sport. Went to a stag dinner the other night, all journalists. They'd sent for her at the last minute because she'd got a scoop and they wanted to tell her what a trump she was."

"Did you go?" asked Emily.

"No," said he.

"Why not?" Norris inquired.

For an instant he didn't answer. He was exceedingly anxious not to pose as a chivalrous defender of any sort, especially before his father and mother; but there was indeed only one reason and he had to give it.

"Well," said he, "I couldn't. Anyway I thought I couldn't. I'd seen her with Charles, and it didn't — well, it didn't seem as if I could. There's Helen, you know."

His mother turned to him with a look he loved and was proud of and knew he should treasure in some dim, unsearched corner of his heart. And yet he wished she wouldn't look at him like that, with such a horrible excess of bare emotion. He didn't want anybody to, even if it

were Helen he was defending. John's own unspoken life was a thing of hidden pains and sweetness. He couldn't admit anybody to it, except grandsir now and then, and even that was all implication, a glance, a shared certainty that, since they were both men, one at the end of the way and the other its beginning, they knew some according secrets of the road.

"What's her name?" Norris inquired, out of a strong repugnance at asking. Desirable as it was to know, he hated to hear John turning in evidence.

"Mrs. Davenport," said John promptly and yet a little distastefully, as if the name itself held unspoken implications.

"A widow?" asked his mother.

"I don't know," said John. Perhaps he wanted now to throw the whole thing by. He had opened his bag of tawdry accumulations, and he might be supposed to be so tired of carrying them to this very end that he was glad to cast the empty bag itself away. "It's thought not. Anyway there's no Davenport in sight. She's on her own. She's got plenty of money, and she spends it."

Norris was frowning blackly. For a startled instant Emily thought he, too, like Charles, took back to the dead and gone Tracy of the lowering brow. Charles, or John who was witness against Charles, seemed to have roused undesirable family characteristics that might have been considered in the light of retributive ghosts.

"Where's Helen?" grandsir asked, turning now to Emily. She was evidently the one to know.

"Round the corner here," she answered hurriedly, as if Helen had to be summoned. "She's with Jessie, and the telephone's in Jessie's name."

"I should speak to her at once and ask them to come

over here," said grandsir. "Charles has just been in, so you're pretty sure he won't come back. You go, Emily. Invite them to come over."

Emily started obediently, and John called after her, in a voice of surprising eagerness and depth of anticipation after the dull level of his testimony:

"Tell her I'll go over and get 'em."

While Emily was away, grandsir sat thoughtfully tapping one nervous yet still capable hand on the table, musing, it seemed to the other two, on matters afar from them. Yet it must be about this upheaval which concerned them equally, and Norris felt there might be things that could be said before Emily got back. Not that she was a prude: she might ignore the shameful facts of life, but she wouldn't wince over them; yet he did feel an indignant pity of her, a sense of outrage in the unhappy complications of her son's life. But John didn't wait to consider what it would be well to say. He simply burst out:

"Grandsir, isn't Charles a beast?"

"John!" exclaimed his father with what was, after all, but a perfunctory sternness. He still felt the actual presence of his wife in the room, and it seemed to him she mustn't, in these male crudities, be doubly hurt. But grandsir answered and, though absently, at once:

"Yes, John, yes. To be sure he's a beast."

"You seem to be taking it all for granted," said Norris. "You haven't even heard what Helen has to say for herself, but you're determined Charles —"

There he paused, for he, too, was condemning Charles. Only he was sick in the very recesses of his soul, not so much over Charles as that sacred entity, the family, which had seemed to him, against reason as it might apply to other families, to cohere with the tenacity of the earth



itself. And now its atoms, because one had been loosened, chipped out by the savage blade of mischance, were shaken into a miserable insecurity. Norris had never known how solid the realities of his life had seemed to him until the tiger of time — call it the beast of destiny, call it retribution for old sins, or what you will — but at any rate it had teeth and claws — had fallen upon his mortal delusions and shaken them to bits.

They sat there, the three generations, grandsir musing in an apparent tranquillity common to his years, Norris still frowningly as if he, who had begotten Charles, must be held responsible for him, and John in a high state of excitement looking from one to the other, at moments, almost furtively — though there was nothing ignoble in the seeking glance — but as if he wished, he so terribly wished, he could get inside their hidden cells and find out what they really thought about things — not Charles alone but life. John dwelt a great deal on the ordered, illusive, scintillant progress of emotions he called life, but he couldn't ask anybody to tell him the proven solutions he thought they ought to have found: certainly not an older man. And one reason he couldn't was that it seemed to him the older men hadn't any real solutions to offer; they had just relinquished things at various stages, one series of hopes here, one equally pungent set of fears there. They eased themselves, as they sailed, by throwing out the most precious freight, spices, silks and gems from Samarcands of the soul, and the ballast they kept to trim ship was the same old sand they had scooped up at the island where the sorcerers live who tell you the silks and spices aren't really worth anything after all and you'd better fill the hold with something that has weight, at least. John thought he could tell the older men a few things that would



make them sit up, not matters of experience but of his inner certainties, because, when you were young, you simply saw. You knew. What you wanted was for the older men to tell you whether they knew, too; if they did, you could have thrilling communion together. But they either didn't know or they wouldn't speak, and that was why there had to be a compact of secrecy between you — an honorable silence.

John sometimes had his doubts whether grandsir was so absorbed in the things of age that he didn't remember the things of youth, too. He doubted it again now, stealing another glance at him which grandsir, this time, met. The figure of the old man was very still, even to that finger on the table, but in his eyes there was a light, so keen, so piercingly directed to the very centre of conjecture that John's heart beat responsively and choked him. "I see," the glance said. "I hear. I'm right on deck, one of the captains of this little pageant. You needn't obey me, if you don't want to. You are a captain, too, you know. But our ships'll speak each other when they're passing on this lambent, heaving sea." It was so real to John that a self in grandsir had really called to a self in him that he half rose from his chair and the red came into his face. In another instant he thought he must actually have spoken, said something foolish perhaps, in his mad desire to probe the mystery; but his father roused from his own especial musing and asked:

"What is it, John? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said John shamefacedly, and went to poke the fire.

He wouldn't look at grandsir. He thought he should see in those eyes another sort of message, a smiling one that said, "We know." And yet he couldn't demand it and

perhaps be disappointed, he was so terribly desirous of having it there. But he was conscious of a great wave of happiness, of thrilling nerve and rushing blood. Life — what he called life — seemed to him almost too rapturous to be borne.

And now Emily came back, with her sewing this time. She brought her basket and set it on grandsir's table, took her thimble from it and began absently slipping it on and off. She stood there, doing this like a rite of patience, and grandsir, who knew why she often took to sewing, realized she dreaded the approaching interview extremely.

"Are they coming?" Norris asked.

"Oh, yes," said she, "they're coming."

John got out of his chair, but she turned to him decisively.

"You're not to go over after them. Helen said no."

So John subsided, though unwillingly. He thought mother might have arranged it so that he could show Helen where he stood. A few minutes more they waited, and then Emily said:

"I told Susan to send them up here."

Norris looked uncertainly at his father. He often had kindly projects of saving father anxieties father had no idea of sparing himself. Emily caught the look, and replied to it before he had time to speak.

"Oh, she wouldn't be satisfied for a minute unless she saw grandsir the first thing. Besides —" And as she looked at grandsir with her slight smile, he knew, and so this time did the others, that she felt they were entirely incapable of dealing with the situation without him.

And then came the ring below and footsteps on the stairs: but no other sound. Helen and her sister were not talking. They came as silently as leaders of a procession at some solemn scene.

## IV

EMILY was at the door to meet them, and she and Helen kissed; but Jessie, whom the family knew but slightly, came last with a little upward glance of deprecation. Were they prepared to accept her, the glance seemed to ask. Helen went on into the room, directly to grandsir, who got on his feet to receive her. And Jessie, again making herself of secondary importance, went through the necessary forms of greeting with John and his father. The two young women brought a sudden disturbance into the room, a quickening of the pace. They were so fine and comely in a wonderful way, Helen tall, most delicately made, with pale skin, blue-grey eyes and soft black hair, and Jessie strikingly like her, only with a slight added fulness of the cheeks and figure, a color that was ready to spring and a deeper blue of the eyes. Helen looked like the dreams of the poets. She was of those women who suggest ineffable things which may be in the woman or may not, but are at least an imperious call to the unsatisfied in others. They are to each man the embodiment of his own dream, dreams he may not know he ever had. But Jessie, slightly shorter, definite in her movements and her voice, was the earthly counterpart to Helen's impalpable suggestiveness. John, looking from one to the other in a new recognition of Jessie's likeness, yet her difference, felt the overwhelming delightfulness of them both in a way that made him stammer

when she told him he and she were of the same craft. He knew it; but at that instant he seemed too awkward even to hold a pen. And while the others were talking, after Jessie had been presented to grandsir and had greeted him with a pretty deference, not too pronounced, he was wondering, as he always wondered when he was with her, over the eternal challenge — innocence itself — of Helen's face. It was as if the design of the face had been completely finished on a faultless plan, and then skilful fingers had gone to work at it again with the utmost delicacy of touch and had manipulated it into a slight irregularity you couldn't possibly define. This was a suggestion of mystery, a pregnant hint of the unknown, so that, once having seen it, you returned to it again and again. What did it mean, that slight droop of the lids, the tiny upward curl at the right-hand corner of the mouth, the dimple that bewilderingly came and then disappeared capriciously? If you were plain man or woman you dwelt upon it in an irritated, fascinated wonder; if you were of a musing turn of mind, you felt it must mean something extraordinary, and lost yourself following it back to a princess dimly dreamed of, a sorceress of old Nile. When she came in, the face bore the slightest hints of a tragedy resolutely suppressed. She hadn't indeed known how they would receive her; but now she was laughing while grandsir chaffed her, as he often did, about her looks, which he adored. And when she laughed, her long curled lashes and the dimple that appeared from somewhere made the challenge of her face one of another sort and still irresistible.

"Your sister's the girl for my money," he said. "She looks just what she is, good as apples and straight as a string; but you, you hussy! you're a million things before

anybody can have you taken up for sorcery. What do you do it for? ”

Jessie glanced up with a questioning look straight at him, when he began; but being no fool she concluded this was a negative form of the homage Helen was accustomed to. She turned her attention to John, while Norris and his wife drew a little nearer the table and joined the talk with the two others: but never about Charles or the upheaval in the family. John was making sure of that. One ear was inclined toward them while he and Jessie talked.

“What paper are you on?” she asked him.

“I’m not on a paper,” said John. “I’m on my own — pitching into the war.”

“Pitching into the war? you haven’t turned pacifist?”

“Lord, no! what makes you think that?”

“I knew you weren’t in the beginning.” She had a curt, clipped, almost a boyish habit of speech. “How could I know but you’d gone bad? You said pitching into the war.”

“I mean pitching into us — America — the way she’s taking it. We’re carrying on a sort of propaganda, a few of us — ”

“You wrote the dialect poems, didn’t you?”

He was pleased beyond measure. There had been floods of commendation, and always the support of his efferescing colleagues, but this girl was not of Boston; she was of New York and later, France.

“How’d you know?” he stammered.

“Why, bless you! they were signed, weren’t they? They’re mighty good. How many have you done?”

“Eleven.”

“I’ve seen five. Yes, they’re all right. You keep on. If you’re epigrammatic enough and uncouth enough you

can make 'em stick. And when you've hit the popular mind you'll get into the popular memory, and the thing's done."

"So you think the pen's mightier than the sword?"

"Sometimes," she returned. "Not always — in war time," and they looked at each other and laughed.

He was becoming exhilarated over a girl who could talk his language and praise him, too. But she snapped him off that issue.

"Can you see the moon from that hall window? the window we passed coming upstairs?"

"I don't know," said John. "Want to come and look?"

"Yes, thank you, I do."

She got up with such promptitude that they were out of the room before the others noticed their going. But at the hall window, John searching the heavens innocently for astronomical data, she said, with the directness of a savage predetermination:

"Now — what attitude are they going to take?"

"They?"

He came back from the heavens and stared stupidly.

"Yes. About Helen — and Charles."

"I can tell you what stand I'm going to take," said John. "I adore Helen."

"You don't have to adore her," said Jessie coldly. "It isn't a question of adoring her and standing by her for that. It's a question of what you think — whether she's justified, whether she's right."

"Of course she's right," said John.

"You haven't heard her side."

"No. But Charles is a beast."

She ignored that, but he saw she wasn't going to qualify it.

"Has he been here?" she continued.



"Yes. He was here to-night."

"What did he say?"

"About her? Nothing much. A word or two."

"His side of it, of course."

"Charles wouldn't see there was any other side. But in point of fact all he said was that she's threatened him with divorce."

"Helen adores your mother," said she, in a tone falteringly warmer than any he had expected from her. Evidently she wasn't daring to put the straight question as to his mother's attitude. She wasn't risking it, it meant so much to her.

"I don't know," said John, "what mother'll say — finally. She didn't say much to-night." And it dawned on him that he had been too tremendously excited over the stand he meant to take himself to pay much attention to the way these older people were tending.

And now some cooling of the first rash temperature of her resolution chilled the girl and she wilted perceptibly from her outspokenness. Perhaps it came over her that this was an odd interview, they two getting nearer and nearer the hateful state of things wherein Charles was mutually agreed to be a beast and Helen his prey.

"You see," she said, in a rather small and faltering voice, "I've come back here to stand by Helen, take her through it, you know. She didn't send for me. I gave up my job in France and just came. And I do so want to know where Charles's family is going to stand. It seems as if I'd got to know."

And again he was ready with the hot assurance:

"I can tell you where I am, all right. I adore her."

Now this seemed to him, as he made it, and to Jessie, as she heard it, more than the intemperate vaporings of youth



spreading its largess abroad. John felt, with a beating pulse, that he had told the big secret that lay in the midmost centre of his heart: that nothing could ever be so beautiful, so mysterious, and so unapproachably divine as Helen. Her spell upon him had been laid when she came first to the house, the inexplicably secured treasure of Charles, and this was when John had been little more than sixteen. In her sweetness she had kissed him — at her going away, when she was penetrated with gratitude at all Charles's people for accepting her — but he looked so appalled by the wonder of it that she never did it again. At the moment he saw her he had begun to grow up. He wrote verses to her and said them over in secret. For a time even Charles shared in that glamour, because it seemed impossible that Charles should be nothing more than a lithe animal, setting his hoof on the delicate flowers of life, if he could lure this bewildering creature to him and bind her with a spell. And now, under the stimulus of her escape from Charles, the last reason why he should not give free inward rein to his romantic passion seemed to have vanished; and here was Jessie who also adored her and would understand. But she, too, had caught in the declaration the precise value he put into it. She spoke with a coldness that threw him back on himself, and he hated her and his own rashness in giving himself away to her.

"I haven't much use for people's adoring Helen," she said. "It's chiefly because her eyes droop and her mouth turns up at the corner. It's a liberty. A good many people take it, but it's a liberty all the same."

"I tell you I'm going to stand by her," said John hotly. "Is that a liberty?"

"It's of no importance whatever," said Jessie, turning

away from the moonless window. "I was asking about your father and mother. You're only a kid."

This didn't actually hurt because it was not, in his estimation, true. But he had to answer it.

"I can tell you my age, if you'd like to know it," he said, with a scrupulous incisiveness. "I was twenty-one last August. To a woman of your age —"

What he had intended to add, he could not possibly have told. If he could goad her into resenting something, however fantastic, the game was, at least briefly, in his hand. And he had scored. At the door of grandsir's room she stopped and came back a step.

"I am just twenty," she said haughtily. "As it happens, my birthday was yesterday. If you don't believe it, you can ask Helen."

And she turned about to go in, John, behind her, forgetting his late anger and rejoicing exceedingly. For he had got the best of her. He had made her angry. Jessie, as the others saw her now, looked so high-headed and still resentful that Helen wondered what John could have told her. Was it something to the detriment of her hold on these dear people she loved with all her heart? And she was never to find out, partly because Jessie herself did not fully understand. She had been living under a strain on this difficult road of seeing Helen through; she had longed exceedingly for the coming of the family: for if they were to stand by Helen the strain would be eased incalculably. But here was this cocky younger brother who seemed, with his vaporings of adoration for Helen, to be clouding the issue between her and the others who were the only ones to count. Norris was the first to look up at them, and their air of heightened tension escaped his unexpectant eyes.

"Well, children, where've you been?" he asked, and

it was John who answered. This was indeed out of the goodness of his heart, because he couldn't go back to the ostensible purpose of their withdrawal and say they'd been to look at the moon.

"I wanted to show Miss Lisle my marbles," he said guilelessly.

"Your marbles?" repeated his father. "What do you mean by your marbles?"

"My marbles," said John pleasantly, "and my railroad train. Kids of my age have marbles and railroad trains."

But Emily, who knew her son's face like a book in her native tongue, and grandsir who could read the human language of Jessie's scarlet cheek and raging eyes, knew no return to the toys of childhood could have raised such signals there.

Immediately on their coming in, Helen had risen, and Norris said:

"I'm going round with you. If John'll let me," he added, smiling at his son whose boy worship of Helen was one of the open secrets the family protected and approved. "If he won't, we'll both go."

But Helen went up to him and laid a hand on his arm and looked at him so that he was at once persuaded.

"Please!" she said. "Really, dear, I mean it. Jess and I've been talking about it, and we've decided we'd rather go about alone — just now anyway. Please!"

The end of it was that nobody went with them, everyone being convinced of her meaning what she said, for reasons she had, whether mistakenly but certainly with seriousness, thought out, and all but grandsir followed on to see them out of the door and off the steps. It was like a country departure and farewell, a chorusing of good-nights. But Helen, gaily as she played her part in it, did

give one look along the street before she turned down the hill. What if she saw Charles, that shape which had once held the sum of virile mastery, coming toward her, to take her by the arm and push her along beside him to his ogre's castle?

John let his father and mother get inside the door again and then slipped past them and went pelting over the stairs. He meant to see grandsir before they got up there with their qualifyings and explainings, to find out just what had happened. Grandsir was not at his table now. He had made his way to the hearth, coaxed up the fire and sat there leaning back in a great chair, the picture of sad weariness. But he looked up and nodded at John, as if to assure him he wasn't too tired for any gay challenging youth might put, and John didn't pause in the attack.

"What did they say to her?" he burst out. "Mother and father?"

"Nothing," said grandsir, "that is, of any importance. Nothing about Charles."

"Well, what did you say?"

"Nothing. Your mother asked Helen if the dress she was wearing was blue or black and how old Jessie was —"

"Hang Jessie!" John broke in.

"Oh, yes, Jessie'll be hanged fast enough if she keeps on looking the way she did when you came in together."

"Now did you ever see an uglier looking girl — I mean, ill-tempered, hateful," said John, though he could hardly stop for Jessie, he was so bent on leaping back to Helen. "Who'd ever think she was Helen's sister? They're no more alike —"

"Why, no," said grandsir, smiling at him in the tired, patient way that showed he'd had about all of youth he could stand until his old body stopped aching. "Jessie's

all right. She may not burn the topless towers of Ilium — ”

“ You say that because Helen’s named Helen,” said John, yet longing to hear more, to invoke unmeasured praise of Helen and the justifying of his own inward love.

“ But,” said grandsir drawing one leg up and laying a commiserating hand on it, “ Jessie’s sound as apples.”

“ Didn’t anybody say a word? ” John persisted — for he heard his father and mother talking and knew there was scant time — “ not about Charles or what they’re going to do? ”

“ Not a word.”

“ Then,” said John, “ how are they going to know whether the family means to stand by ’em? ”

“ I guess they know,” said grandsir. “ Seems to me we all behaved ” — here a cruel twinge tore him and he added mildly — “ pretty much as usual.”

Norris did not come up again, but Emily did, bringing his good night. He meant to work a while before going to bed.

“ Mother,” said John, “ didn’t you say anything to Helen — not a word — to show her how we stand? ”

“ No,” said Emily. But she smiled slightly at grandsir, and he knew she had seen him write a couple of words on a slip of paper and lay it before Helen when she came to look over his shoulder at the tree catalogues. “ Come to-morrow,” the paper read; Emily could not know this, but she was aware that it was fully arranged for Helen to come back again and sit down with grandsir to a consideration of — what?

“ But she may not come again,” said John. “ She may not feel at liberty to.”

“Oh, yes,” said his mother placidly, “I guess they’ll come.”

Then Allan Lloyd was summoned from his little upstairs room to help grandsir to bed. He was a Grasslands boy who was grandsir’s attendant on the daily road of difficulty where even the bravest may no longer walk alone.

## V

NORRIS went off to his own room, where only a few of the necessary pieces of furniture for studious pursuits had been moved in to give him an immediate workshop. The result was an austerity of beauty of the sort always to be found in a simplicity of the antique. A mullioned window of three parts looked toward the north and outside it to-night the constellations were set in an order he knew, though he was aware, if he went to trace their divine remembered beauty, he should find the city brightness had dimmed them out. But he did not go. The stars — that august majesty which had been too much for him in Grasslands, before he fled away from it to the nearness of men — were not what he wanted to reconcile him to life and the cruel jolts upon its road. He sat down at the big table and, though he knew he should not write, laid out paper before him and even absently took his pen. He was of those who, writing by profession, have the compelling habit of it, and who can think their best and talk their best with a pen in hand, who are too often tongue-tied in the ordinary intercourse of life, but establish some mysterious *rappport* between themselves and things worldly and beyond through the medium of their two familiars, pen and paper. He had had a great many vigils with pen and paper in these last years of a sort he thought he couldn't share with his wife or even his father, though his father, having gone the same road of middle age, might be supposed to know some of the things he was feeling.



Up to the beginning of the war, Norris, as we have seen, had gone a pleasant enough path, quite aware he hadn't fulfilled old promises or touched the outer rim even of that globe of hope which had flown before him like a bubble radiant in the sun of all things. He had meant to cause his name to be remembered; but it wasn't going to be save in a meagre paragraph in biographical lists and on the backs of books nobody was likely, save from dim parochial reasons, to take down from the shelves. And then the war came, and he found himself drawn into the gigantic circle of life as a whole. In comparison with that, what were the tiny literary strivings of one New England man? Also, he found he didn't care about himself any more, his individual life and death. He did care passionately for the preservation of certain invisible divinities of belief there hadn't seemed to be any need of talking about before this great winnowing began, the beating of the wings of destiny. And he was now in that most pathetic zone of earthly life when a man can still agonize over the fortune of events he is powerless to sway. He was inexplicably inert, too, as to the pen, and felt an ingenuous admiration of John who could write by the ream, who could work off his indignations on paper, and who hit the heart of the matter surprisingly well. Old men for counsel, he thought wonderingly. But old men hadn't always the courage to counsel. They may have lost the rash valor that ought to stand behind the word, or the word is void. They are blocked by a multitude of foes bred by their own reverses, memories of quests undertaken in vain, small timidities, anxious balancing of good and ill. Yet he wasn't old. Men older than he were fighting in France and offering heroic counsel to America to fight also. Only — he had heard the lutanist. That phrase in the Dunsany play had hit him in the

centre, at first reading, and it stayed with him. The Queen had harped on this omen, — you heard the lutanist when death was coming; wistful, tremulous, you heard and shrank — and waited. Norris knew that differing people, varying temperaments, heard him at fated periods in their lives. The note might come to the young with a shock, and halt them in their dance. It might come to the old with a crescendo of mournful melody. Had his father heard it? When he was sitting there regnant above his disabilities, was he hearing the pipe from the mountains of desire or dread, nearer and more near? Yet his father never spoke of death. The middle-aged heard it — but he was not sure he would have caught the plaintive note so soon, since his body was not warning him, if the purpose of his life, the writing of books, had not failed him.

For Norris knew, as his publishers patiently knew, that nobody, in a large manner of speaking, read his books. It was one of the disheartening things about it all that the text-books brought him in their surprising income, and the novels, they that were he, himself, the documents of his life as he lived it, nobody really wanted. He had thought about it for years, at first with resentment because he was talking and nobody would hear. Then when war came, with its clangor of reproach and accusation and its big books unrolled where the debit and credit of nations and individuals stood red as blood, he began to suspect himself instead of the world. This was a time when, mysteriously, every man had to show what was in him. A man responded to great challenges, or he skulked, he stood up valiantly and told the truth without fear, or he lied; yet, if he lied he knew he was condemned. So clear was the air of this great time that you found yourself measured up with imperishable values, even if you turned your back on them.

But you knew they were there. And Norris now began to suspect he had not reached the heart of man because he was not true enough. Not all who did reach it were true; they might be the mountebanks of the written word, they might be the soporific after the day. But the high task he had thought himself embarked on must be founded on the rock that is the support of human life. Hitherto literature had been his sweet solace, after the dinginess of things, his other house he went into from the clangor of the streets. And because it was another house, though far more wonderful, perhaps he had elaborated and so betrayed its language. It was not the plain man's manual. He had translated it into another medium which is known as literature, and what should the plain man care for that?

His door was open, and he heard his wife passing and knew she would not turn her head, much less speak to him, because, when he was at work, she held herself apart and left him to his task. And this was right, even if the task had been of a less delicate texture; but to-night it irritated him, because it seemed to fit in with his own past attitude. Why should he be regarded with some special sanctity because he was sitting here fitting words together? He ought to be of such robust mind that great verse and prose went surging and trampling through his head and spoke so loudly the domestic voices couldn't jar their sequence.

"Emily!" he called and she came in.

Seeing her in the dim light beyond the circle of his reading lamp he thought, with a recognition that seldom moved him now, he was so used to her, how beautiful she was, in a sequestered way, how fine and noble. She was so near to him in every process of their life together that he seldom got her far enough removed to look at her dispassionately. He had, indeed, ceased thinking about her. Need he think

about his right hand, except as it might fail to serve him with its accustomed adroitness, or as it needed kindness because it was cramped and cold?

"Emily," said he, "have you read all my books?"

"No," said she, "not the text-books — all of them."

"No, no, the novels. Have you read them?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him with her direct, questioning sincerity.

"The last one?"

"I haven't finished it."

"Where did you leave off?"

The color came into her face, a tinge and then a surge of red. Norris seeing it, laughed softly. He knew he was putting her in a tight place, but he wasn't going to help her out of it.

"I think" — said she, and then she paused.

"Come, come," said he, with a brusqueness she knew was feigned, "I don't mean paragraphs and pages. I mean the story. Take the hero. I suppose we've got to keep on saying hero, even if we're not swashbuckling. What was he doing?"

"I think —" said Emily again.

It can't be denied the novelist was disconcerted; still, he was plainly enjoying it. Norris always did, in a mildly grim way, relish his own discomfiture. He was wont to say about some of the ironic things that had happened to him: "It's a joke on me."

"The amount of it is," he said, "you couldn't tell where you were, to save you. And I'll bet you knew that would be so and you've got a bookmark in."

"Why, yes," said Emily, plucking up spirit now there was a chance for practical rebuttal, "I always use a bookmark."

"Don't you see," said Norris, "that if the story'd been absorbing enough you couldn't have left it five months with the book-mark in? You'd have whirled over the pages you remembered and hit the one line you hadn't read."

"I always use a book-mark," said Emily again, obstinately. "I don't have much time to read. You know that, Norris."

"Ah," said Norris, "but if the story was what it ought to be, you couldn't help reading. You'd leave the plough-share in the mould and the needle in my shirt to prick me with. (O Emily, that I could once, only just once be stabbed by such a needle!) You'd hide the story under cushions for fear somebody'd get it away from you. That's the way we used to read books, Emily — some books. Now —" he hurled it at her — "what's the matter with mine?"

And to his amazement he got an answer.

"You write," said Emily, "about the insides of people."

Norris was so amazed that he realized, with the same suddenness, how little he had expected a rebuff.

"But," he said, "what is there about people except their insides?"

"There isn't," said Emily timidly, and yet also as if she had her own argument intact, "much story."

"Story!" said Norris.

The progress of the human soul through this world, its epic griefs and ironies,— isn't that, he thought, story?

"I know," said Emily hastily, "there are lots of people that want to know exactly how the characters feel, but the general run, Norris, want to know what they do."

"I thought," said Norris humbly, "I made them do things. I try."

"Yes," said she, "they do. But it's almost all inside them. And you tell it beautifully, Norris, beautifully. But you tell it like poetry. And John said the other day, life was — it wasn't about books he said it — but I overheard him saying it to that poor Mr. Brennan — he said life is —"

"Well," shouted Norris, so that she jumped slightly in her chair — "what *is* life, according to John?"

"Brass tacks," said Emily faintly.

It seemed to her horrible to bring such objects into the workroom where Norris wrought his beautiful prose; but he had challenged her. And now she drew a breath of relief and smiled a little, for he had burst into a great laugh.

"So that," said he, "is life according to John."

With that, she saw, he was going to end their literary conversation, and she felt deeply relieved. But he was putting it away to think over by himself. He might find, he generously owned, that he was much indebted to her and John.

"We didn't get far with Helen, did we?" he remarked, and Emily rose to go, feeling again the imminence of high tasks in this dedicated room.

"Did you mean to?" she asked.

"No, I don't s'pose I did. Not definitely. But after what Charles said — well, what are you going to do about it anyway?"

"About asking her to stay with him?"

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently, when she paused, "it's a devil of a coil I know. But how are we ever going to get her side of it? You didn't even ask her to come again."

"I gave her a key," said Emily.

"Gave her a key? When?"



“There at the door, when you and Jessie were talking about the river. I gave her a key and told her that was so she could come in any time, without ringing.”

Norris smiled broadly at her. He had wanted to take a stand without being judicial about it, and he was distinctly relieved.

“Well,” said he, “I guess you’ve cast your vote all right.”

But when the family took itself to bed it was, in its various ways, exceedingly perplexed over Helen. She was herself, yet different, a little farther retired into that inner retreat of hers where nobody had a certainty of penetrating, or, if he had in a moment of his own need or her graciousness, no confidence in ever entering again. And this was not because she gave a sense of wilful seclusion: only perhaps that her beauty was of the nature of a thrilling promise that only unimagined courts of the spirit could fulfil. For the last year or two she had seemed different to the family. Emily, lying there staring into the dark and perfectly conscious that her husband was staring out also and interrogating the same spirits of night, could not quite remember when it began, or at least if it had been long since she noticed it. But she had tried to tell herself, when she first fancied Helen was growing stiller, a deeper shade of thought upon her, that this was because she was traveling away from girlhood, contentedly perhaps but still leaving behind her the rainbow confusion of the first of things. And once a little quick word she dropped made Emily suspect she had wanted children, and Charles, Emily knew, deliberately hated them. If the word did mean it, Helen never let fall another; but Emily was glad of that once, to account normally for the veiled gravity of her look. And still the



look was there, sadder, more baffling, almost conscious of itself at last, as if it recognized there was something it must not tell. And no wonder, Emily thought, blushing hot with shame there in the darkness, if John were right and another woman had driven her from her home.

## VI

It was the next evening about half an hour after dinner that the hall door opened softly and somebody slipped in. Emily, who was in the dining-room, glanced up from her housewifely absorption of arranging silver in the side-board drawer, and saw a cloaked figure going up the stairs. Helen, she knew, and, remembering John was off to his gang and Norris for a run on the embankment, she was glad. Helen and grandsir could count on uninterrupted talk.

When Helen reached grandsir's door she found it closed; but a slip of paper with "Helen" written on it faced her from an upper panel. This was a device of grandsir's, infrequently used but often enough to keep it in observance. When he wanted one of the family only, he indicated it, and the rejected turned, unhurt, away. Helen tapped and, on his response, went in. There he was, sitting at his writing table, and he had so scrupulously rested for this interview that he had an emanating radiance of well-being that, old man as he was, lent his frail distinction a most unexpected charm. Helen dropped her muff and came to him in a swift, lovely approach, all eagerness.

"Well, my girl," said he, "here's your chair."

It was close by his, so that, sitting obliquely toward the table, they faced each other. He took her hands and held them a minute, and Helen met the interrogation of his look. They both smiled, indeed, as if they said: "What-

ever spectres rise from the slain of family warfare, it sha'n't make any difference to us." Grandsir began:

"Charles has been here. You knew, of course."

"No," she said, "I didn't really know. That is, nobody's told me."

"Well, you'd have guessed it."

"I wasn't sure he'd got back. So he's come. And that's why everybody seemed so prepared for me."

"What do you mean by prepared?"

"You know," said Helen, smiling at him. "They didn't ask a question. Wasn't it darling of them?"

"Are you going to tell me," said grandsir, "what you left him for?"

She sat looking down at her hands, gently freed now from his, and smoothing the long gloves on her knee. But he didn't follow her gaze. He studied her face instead, and it hurt him to see the color come slowly into it and dye it to a deep unhappy crimson. He knew what that blush meant. It was not the misery of a woman compelled to speak of things that break the ordered beauty of the social world. Helen had no *gauche* timidities. It was suffering of a deeper sort. Then suddenly she looked up at him and he was startled by the sadness of her clear long-lashed eyes, the stern, though soft, sincerity of them.

"Do we need," she asked, "to go into that?"

"No," said he. "Only I want to be your advocate. I want to be able to say, 'I understand. I know the whole business and you can take it from me the blame is not hers.'"

She smiled at him with a quick radiance that again moved him. He couldn't get used to Helen. None of them ever could. She was change itself over that deep unvarying reticence, like light and shadows on the sea.

"Ask me," she said. "Ask me questions."

"Well," said he, plunging because that was the only course, "you think he's doing things that are — in bad taste, we'll say?"

"Yes."

She sat with her eyes immovably holding his, as if she had to ensure that response also as well as the communion of the lips.

"You've heard he's trotting around with a — a Mrs. Davenport."

That really startled her.

"How did you know?" she countered. "He didn't tell you."

"No. But he did tell his father and mother you had left him, and John said afterward he'd seen Charles running round with a newspaper woman named Davenport. So — it's natural to conclude —"

There he left it, passed it over to her, indeed, seeming to imply it was up to her to do something with it. Helen's brows were drawn together now in the tense line of concentration. She took a leisurely long time to make her answer.

"I don't think," she said then, "that Mrs. Davenport is altogether my reason. You can call her — my excuse."

"Ah!" said grandfather. His delicate face flushed with the excitement of finding she was as brave and finely rash as he had known her. Always he had told himself, Helen would want to escape from Charles. The moment would come with her first discovery of the real Charles. But her nature, the integrity of it, would hold her to her promise so long as her husband kept his. And now he had given her the excuse and she was going.

"You don't — " he began and then blundered into what seemed to him a silly ending — "you don't love him."

Helen, still with her eyes on his, as if he were the defendant and she the prosecutor, put her question:

"Now, what is love?"

A certain kind of person could have asked that question of grandsir and he would have laughed and put the mawkish foolery by with some foolery of his own. But this was Helen. She was the stillest of human creatures, locked up in her house of emotions, and she meant stark earnest.

"Charles's love?" said he. "Well, it's something I shouldn't have picked out, in the open market, for a girl like you."

She hardly seemed to hear him. The question, indeed, might have been one she put to herself, having adventured it many times without finding an answer, and being, in a way, obliged to keep on with it until somebody should invest her with clear knowledge and absolve her from the necessity of further dwelling on it.

"I can understand," she said, "how I could have been fascinated. I saw in him — everything — everything that makes a man worth living and dying for. But how could I stop being fascinated and then see in him nothing except — other kinds of things! It isn't what women do, you see. They are supposed to go on hoping and believing even when there's nothing to hope for or believe in. But if I don't believe in him, I simply don't love him. Just now I feel as — as alien to him as if he were a stranger that had broken into the house and tied my hands and I'd got to sit there in the chair where he tied me, seeing him walk round the room and — well, just that."

Grandfather had one despair which accounted for the personal mishaps of life and one belief that seemed to

remedy them. Domestic relations, he believed, were chiefly obliquities. They continued often, in a miserable bondage, because all domestic life is a sacrifice to expediency. But now here was Helen leaving her husband because she plainly hated him and daring to say so without excuse. He began to have hope of the institution of the family.

"Well," said he, "what are you going to do?"

"I've done it," said Helen, "the worst of it. I've left him."

"But he thinks you're going to enter suit for a divorce."

"Yes," said she, "I suppose he does. I threatened him, in a way, and he thought I meant — that. But there's something else — it's the thing I don't tell you that is at the bottom of it all. And I can't tell you. I simply can't."

"So it isn't Mrs. Davenport?"

"Ostensibly. But it's as I told you. She's not my reason. She's my excuse."

"Ah," said grandfather, "you're showing beyond a doubt how far away from him you are. If you loved him, she'd be your reason."

"I don't believe I do love him," said Helen quietly. "I told you."

All the first vivid radiance of her face had gone. She looked haggard and inexpressibly wearied. Her unhappiness — the trouble he had foreseen for her — began, to his mind, to stretch its roots down and down so far that he saw no possibility of pulling up the poison tree. This was his surprise. He had called her here to map out her course perhaps, certainly to clear the air that hung about her relation to the household and assure her it would be kept undimmed. But they hadn't even touched on the real matter. Her recoil from Charles — the inevitable revul-

sion he had looked for to bring about this very parting — was a simple matter compared with the unknown causes festering down there below.

“Now do you need to be mysterious?” he said gently. The show of kindness was all he dared offer her.

“I must,” she said.

“You’re quite sure? there are things you can’t tell me?”

“I can’t tell you yet, anyway.”

“Does Jessie know?”

“No. Jessie knows really nothing. She’s been a dear about it.”

“Well, hang it all!” said grandsir, in a manner markedly boyish in a person over seventy, “I wish I knew! Is it money? I wouldn’t trust him, if he saw a chance to shave a corner.”

Helen laughed and her dimple came out.

“Aren’t you the inquisitive one?” said she. “But I can’t tell you. No, I’ve left Charles. That’s all there is to be said about it. And whether I accuse him — to the law, I mean —” And there she caught herself up as if she were startled at having gone so far.

But in the main she was so controlled that you would have thought the publicity of the courts meant nothing to her. For a minute grandsir thought so. He concluded she hadn’t pictured the hue and cry following on a scandal, and that her innocence ought to be enlightened before she went irrevocably on. But suddenly her face broke up and shivered into a misery that showed him he was the one to be informed.

“That’s why,” she said, in a low, passionate tone, “I’m sorry you’ve all come up here. It would have been easier to bear it down there at Grasslands. The reporters would have gone down, of course, but you could have shut the



door against them. Here it's going to be torture for you all. For Mr. Tracy —" though she loved him extraordinarily, still she wasn't calling Norris father. She had odd little reservations — "He'll be dragged into notoriety, and his books, his dear books! — and he's the one to suffer most, isn't he? I heard you say once his soul is on the outside. Now isn't it? Isn't his soul on the outside? Can't you hurt it frightfully?"

The directness of her appeal made it seem as if having the soul on the outside were a physical fact, and he looked at her, much troubled, wishing she would either tell him all or that he had not persuaded her to tell him anything.

"Helen," said he, "whatever the miserable thing is, it's quite clear to me you ought not to try bearing it alone."

She stopped smoothing her gloves now — she had pulled them out into a soft stringiness not beneficial to gloves — and she rose and stood looking at him thoughtfully.

"No," said she, "I can't say more than I have. If I were sure of the right thing to do, I might."

"Oh, then you're not altogether sure?"

"Not of that. Now!" Her manner brightened with the return to a sane topic untouched by mystery. "Am I to come here?"

"What did Emily tell you?"

"Well," said Helen, her dimple coming out again, "she gave me this key."

"That seems decisive enough."

"So I thought. I couldn't give up mother — easily." Here was another little oddity in her. She had always, though she established no verbal intimacy of names with the rest, called Emily mother. And she did say grandsir because, as she had once exasperated Charles by declaring, he was her most intimate friend.

"You may meet Charles, of course," he began, and, at his tentative pause, she continued, with an unconscious dignity:

"I am not afraid of meeting Charles."

"And perhaps," said grandsir, "that's another reason why Emily gave you a key. If you find Charles, you can always keep right on up here and you'll find me and my legs swearing at each other."

Helen had picked up her muff. She came back to him now with what, it was plain to see, was real solicitude though she had left it until so late.

"How are your darling legs?" she asked.

"My infernal legs," said grandsir, "my condemned and everlastingly to be consigned to perdition legs are as outrageous and altogether devilish as I've seen 'em in the course of my experience with 'em. They're a joke, a farce. They won't walk. They just hang on to me like tassels and ache — ache like the deuce."

"I don't think it's a joke," said Helen softly. "I think it's a tragedy."

She came nearer and bent down and kissed him. Grandsir loved her so absurdly, as he knew, so entirely unlike a fatherly person of seventy-odd, that he was ridiculously moved by the kiss, and didn't feel sure whether he gave it back again. Soft, fragrant lips of her! how could God make such flowers of life and, apparently in ignorance of what He had brought about, lend them for ever so short a time to the possession of Charles? Grandsir had always kept quite clearly in mind the sort of excellence which should have been the lover of Helen.

"O my dear! my dear!" he said, as she turned away. And she came back to him.

"What is it, dear?" she asked. "Something I could do?"

He didn't like usually to have people offering to do things for him in that solicitous way. It meant, he thought, either his age or his infirmity. But Helen, offering service, was different. It was a grace, a charm — well, it was the consummate perfection that was Helen.

“No,” said he, “it's nothing. It's only you, you know. I don't care about my legs, my dear, if they make you so kind to me. I'd rather sit here tied, if it beguiles you into kissing me, than get 'em back — if it meant they'd walk me away from you.”

So Helen laughed and went and he listened for the last faint sound of her on the stairs, and when it had ceased he sighed over youth and age — the youth he wouldn't have back again if he could get it for the asking and the age that was his and whether of value or not he didn't know, it was so menacingly near to him — and got out his orchard plans. The memory of the kiss he kept to taste over again in his wakeful night when the past stood benignly at his bedside with the future, like a hooded Fate, beside her.

Helen, in the lower hall, stopped an instant to listen. The dining-room door was closed now and there were voices and a shout of laughter. She longed to go in. She loved small gaieties, and the laughter — John's laugh, she knew — told her of what nature this was. She felt daring in the measure of the dulness where she and Jessie daily found themselves. She would go in.

## VII

Helen knew John was in there with some of the gang Charles talked about with a distaste touched by anxiety. Charles despised the gang; yet strangely she felt that he was in some degree afraid of it,—and was ashamed of being afraid, they were so young and untried. They had something Charles himself couldn't bound and govern, something that filled him with an uneasy sense of his own limitations. He did indeed despise them, but they were so unfailingly clever, so capable of adapting their facile brains to the language of the market-place, that he saw danger of their actually removing a brick or two from the proud edifice of fortune he was trying so hard to raise. They were so absurdly active and out of all measure frothing over in this time of war, so outspoken in praise and condemnation, and they had no hesitation in taking any means of getting themselves into evidence. They would besiege a yellow journal with verses so outrageous, so funny, that the yellow journal couldn't for its life help printing them. They got sums of money, Charles didn't know where — when he spit out his wrath to Helen he said "God knew" where — and printed pamphlets and circulated them, and always they stayed on the hither side of libel. Their "it is said's" and their "if's" were masterly. They were boys, according to Charles, but they were the cleverest boys in town. And Helen, who did love a gay voice and the quips of youth, longed now to go in and catch up a crisp trifle or two to carry home to Jessie.

More, she was trying with all her mind to understand Charles's activities, and any hand might open a door to them. So she opened this actual door and went in.

There was confusion at the moment, a big laugh from the four young men and Norris whom they had flatteringly begged to join them. Emily sat by the window, sewing. Seeing her, Helen felt an immediate calming of her hesitations. If Emily were there, it wasn't in any sense a secret session. They couldn't be "plotting their deviltries," as Charles said, to any mysteriously dark extent. And in the instant of standing there she took in the picture of them: John by the mantle, lounging a little as he often did, for momentary ease; Finch, with his heavy irregular pink face and light blue eyes and shock of blond hair and the spectacles that alone brought him the knowledge of the world "a foot before him"; Brennan, thin, dark, aquiline, with the quick double note of a cough that sometimes punctuated his talk, and Bailey, with his delicate frame, the blue eyes and pink cheeks of a girl. Yet it was Bailey who had the most deadly designs on the evil that walks abroad, and specified its antidotes with unique profanities. At once they saw her and each was on his feet, while John came forward to present them to her. He did it with a ceremonious precision. This, his manner said, was an occasion.

"I know you already," said Helen, putting out her hand to one after another, with her special yet unconsidered grace. "There ought to be a fifth. Where is he?"

"Come here, Helen," said Emily. Norris had placed another chair in the window. "They're crazy boys. They need us here to keep their feet on the ground."

So Helen went and sat with her in the window, and the

boys — they were not really boys, we know, but their rash valor kept them this side of manhood — they stared at her when they dared, and blushed and sat straighter and each one wished he knew how he looked when he'd come in like this with his hair like a crow's nest and his hands all over with the dust of books. They looked at her, too, in awe, for they knew all about Charles's advertising himself with Mrs. Davenport, and it was in their eyes a superhuman feat for this girlish creature to walk calmly abroad with her furs and her feathers and such a smile — as if she knew nothing about it or, knowing, was too proud to abate one jot of dignity.

"Where is he?" she insisted, really for the purpose of getting into touch, saying something to draw them nearer. "What was his name — the one I saw? I met him once with John. Oh, I know. Niles. John said he was one of you."

"Not now," said John. "Niles is dead."

"We killed him," said Bailey. "He was a pacifist."

"Oh, I see," said Helen. "Does he stay dead?"

"Only to us," said Finch. "He walks, like the other ghosts, and writes on walls that our days are numbered and finished because we believe in fight."

"And you write more things on the wall?"

"No," said Brennan, "we don't draw attention to him. Niles is a good enough fellow. We had to kill him, but when it's all over and the world's decent again we shall dig him up and dust him off and see if he's fit to keep."

"He'll have to answer a good many questions first," said John. "He'll have to recant and eat enough of his words to choke him. And then I won't play with him. No, by George, I won't. The one thing I don't forgive him is his grouch on England."



"Let him grouch," said Norris. "England doesn't mind."

"But, dad, it means something now," said John, with conviction, "to have even one of us putting a knife into her and keeping up the old fool grudge. Don't you see what an awful time it is when all of us — all the mediocrities — have got a chance to speak? And the level of intelligence is so low all the other mediocrities listen to us and we persuade — yes, we do, father, we actually persuade fellows walking on two feet — and they've got a vote, mind you! and that's why I'd gag Niles, if I could. I'd sand-bag him in a dark alley."

"Free speech," said Norris. He was in a bad place, he thought. He mustn't tell these young birds how callow they were. It was salutary for them to know it, if they could manage it of their own intuition, but he must never clip their audacious wings. They were like their brethren flying in France, only these were looping the loop of the passionate spiritual life. They weren't in danger of a fall to death, like the fliers in France, yet still, as he looked at them and heard them, he thought there was something splendid in their fervency. "You'd better get down to business," he suggested. He wanted to know just how far they meant to go while he was here to moderate and qualify.

"Well," said John, "we'd got as far as the money. I'm dead sure of that. Enough for six months at least. We're to send out pamphlets, written without fear or favor. They're not simply to pitch into the Potsdam gang. They're to pitch into our own gangs when they don't run straight —"

"Oh," said Norris, with a benevolent resignation, "you'll end in jail."



"Oh, Mr. Tracy, do you think so? do you actually?" Bailey implored him. "That's the thing we pray for. Oh, to be jugged! Oh, to be pillowed in straw!"

"What then?" inquired Norris. "The ladies' recipe, hunger strike?"

"No, sir," said Brennan, "not on your life. But when we get out — fulminations — thunder and lightnings. The young martyrs — *les jeunes!* — my God! why won't they notice us!" He had forgotten about Helen and her beauty and struck his hand on the table. They had all forgotten Helen, indeed, all but John, and he glanced at her to see if she knew how to take this living earnestness of youth. John knew how to take it, even in himself. On one side of him he was calm. That side always looked on and told him how intemperate he was and what a fool to topple over. It told him he and his mates were needed — for they were clever, they knew — to tell America day and night she must prepare for war, to silence those voices that forbade her preparing, and tell her calmly. But no matter how temperate he set out to be, the bombast came in too, and even that he recognized as a part of youth and so of a certain value. His blood couldn't run so swiftly to his brain if the heart wasn't sending it. Helen, John saw, was listening earnestly. She was perhaps overrating the potency of their youth. He liked it, though. He didn't feel bound to qualify it. Norris was speaking.

"Where'd you get your money?"

"Aha!" said John. "That's telling."

"He'll have to tell if anybody does," said Bailey, who didn't care where money came from if you could print with it. "He's the only one that knows."

And it was apparent that none of them questioned John's mastery over the mysterious fund if they only got a little

room for it, here at the West End, if it would run to that. And in the thick of the discussion John slipped out and ran headlong upstairs to grandsir who was on his couch now, flouting his pain and remembering Helen. The slip on the door had fluttered down and was lying on the sill.

"Grandsir," said John, "dad's asked who gave us the money."

"Well, you didn't tell him, did you?" inquired grandsir.

"No. I asked him was his grandmother a monkey."

"That's right," said grandsir. "Be firm and tactful. No, he'd think I was going to have less for apple trees and folderol."

"But are you, grandsir?" asked John, smitten.

"Am I what?"

"Going to have less for apple trees — too much less, I mean?"

"No," said grandsir. "Besides, the apple trees are only makeshifts. I get more fun out of your deviltries. And I was thinking last night I guessed I could put in a hundred or so more without going broke."

John told him he was a sport, the commendation grandsir liked most, and went off again to his committee, who were still talking fast and all together, about the cost of printing, the distribution of pamphlets, the question whether the papers would quote them. And in a lull, while Norris told them what he thought — for they did really respect his viewpoint — a voice came in from the hall, the voice of Charles. Everybody started, everybody but Helen; and the ones who hadn't time to get themselves in hand looked at her: one glance of inquiry that instantly withdrew itself. Emily got up and laid her sewing hastily aside.

"I'll go," said she.

"I'm going, mother," said Helen, with a perfect assumption of having come to make a social call and terminating it unhurried. "Good-by."

The boys rose, with a little tumult of feet and chairs. She was smiling round the circle. Each of them felt she had tossed him a special glance of a rarely selected value. Then she went, and they heard the outer door immediately close. It was impossible not to conclude she had met Charles face to face, and, whether they had spoken or not, that their greeting had been brief. And Charles himself, when he came in, confirmed the probability. He was red and his brow was lowering.

"I should like to be told," he was pelting on, in the impetus of a sentence begun as he opened the door and choked off as abruptly when he saw the family was not alone. Emily had resumed her seat by the window and was taking up her work.

"Come over here, Charles," she said. "Here's a chair."

But Charles, in the moment of recognition, had changed. His frown smoothed out. He smiled, actually smiled broadly with a radiance of white teeth. John hadn't seen him in that holiday humor for a long time, because, when Charles came to see the family, he wasn't usually trying to persuade them to do something but telling them what he had done or the things he had endured from a fool world. Suddenly, like a flash turned on a picture shrouded in darkness, John saw the Charles he had forgotten, the one who had charmed Helen into forgetting he was an ogre at points and no doubt was charming Mrs. Davenport now. Charles pulled up a chair and his father moved along to bring him to the table.

"Going to let us smoke, mother?" he inquired, bringing out his pipe.

“Yes,” said Emily. “Besides, I’m going away. No, no,” she added, when the boys began protesting, “not for that. I like smoke, really. I ought to have gone before, but I love to hear you boys.”

Meantime she was gathering up her work and now she went, Bailey opening the door. Bailey couldn’t remember any women-folk of his own with anything but wondering endurance. Emily Tracy seemed to him of nature’s best. Now Charles, having lighted his pipe, turned to Finch with the same winning smile, the implication of good fellowship, that was giving John a succession of surprises.

“I wanted to come on you,” said Charles. “You’ve been lampooning me.”

Finch’s small eyes looked smaller and his red face redder. The powerful hand lying on the table unconsciously drew itself together into a fist, not for use, but indicating his unacknowledged state of mind.

“No,” said he, “I wrote a character sketch of you. That’s not lampooning.”

“How did it go?” asked Charles pleasantly.

He drew forth his pocketbook and extracted from it a clipping slowly and with an air of private enjoyment, as if the process might in itself intimidate or exasperate somebody. He began reading, this also with a meaning deliberation.

“He has just one object: to boost Charles Tracy. He is virtually a pacifist, because he doesn’t want to see America in the war. And the reason he doesn’t want to see America in the war is that certain big interests of his own can only be carried out if America is at peace.’” He looked down the clipping to the end, smiling a little, not in an amusement insulting to its quality but with an almost genial interest. “No,” he said tolerantly, “I won’t read it

all. Do you know it, father? Yes, I thought so." He returned it to his pocket. "But," he said, with a patently ingenuous appeal to them to be as old as he was, as soon as possible, and as wise, though, so inconsiderable were they that he, at least, shouldn't take the trouble of correcting them, even for their good, "I suppose you chaps know you're laying yourselves open to about fifteen libel suits a day, the way you're going on."

"We're agreeable," said Bailey. His pink cheeks glowed. His eye-glasses fell off, and left his face absurdly young. "Get us into court and cross-examine us and won't they hear a few things they don't expect? Oh, no!"

"Yes," said Brennan. He had been looking at Charles with open hostility. He was feeling under the weather to-day in a fashion that told him he would be banished again shortly to salutary airs and the country life he loathed. "By God! if you think we say all we've got to say —"

Charles turned to him with the quick beginning of a frown, instantly obliterated. Brennan was disgusting to him. He hated the very hint of physical weakness or omen. The world, he thought, is a place where you want to live while you live. You've got to leave it sometime. What's the use of reminding yourself of that inevitable and most obnoxious end? There ought to be a law to keep lame ducks shut up out of sight of normal folk. But he was instantly the conciliatory Charles again.

"I wish," he said, "you fellows would come and dine with me — to-night, say, at my house."

John threw him a glance frankly and insultingly surprised.

"Oh, come, Charles," he said, "we don't want to be fed."

"Won't anybody come?" asked Charles, looking round the circle. "I'd like to compare notes. Hang it! if a

fellow you've lampooned as you have me wants to sit down and talk things over, you ought to be willing to indulge him."

But they were shy of him; they were hostile. And they didn't even do him the grace to invent the most trivial excuse. It was simply an atmosphere of negation. Brennan got up from his seat and instantly the others rose also, with the air of relief incident to being shown a way out which they hadn't the address to find themselves. They mumbled a good-by to Norris, and John followed them, so that, in a minute more, the door had closed on them and Charles, now bereft of smiles, was left with his father.

Charles smoked heavily, in an absorbed brooding, and Norris, who seemed to himself in for it with no Emily to protect him, also began smoking, with a patient, whimsical look of intending to do his best. Suddenly Charles turned upon him.

"Well," said he. And then as Norris did not answer that tacit invitation, "What the devil was she here for?"

"Who?" Norris inquired mildly. "Your mother?"

"Helen. You didn't ask her here to meet those idiots?"

"Oh, no," said Norris easily. "She came, that was all. It just happened. The idiots were already here."

"What did they come for? anything special?"

"Oh, no. They drop in, you know, to see John."

"Of all the asses —" Charles began. And then he threw the asses overboard and turned to the real matter in hand. "What does Helen say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? She hasn't talked to you?"

"Not a word."

"This the first time she's been in?"

"No, she's been in before."



“What’d she say then?”

“Oh, nothing — of importance. Jessie was with her. They talked about their housekeeping a little — with your mother, chiefly. I was contented to sit and look at them. Lovely creatures!”

“Helen’s all right enough,” said Charles, still brooding. “Jessie’s a fool.”

“Oh, no, she isn’t,” said Norris conclusively. “Jessie’s far from being a fool.”

“Now do you mean to tell me mother didn’t open up the subject with Helen?”

“The subject of you?”

“Yes. Didn’t either you or mother ask Helen point blank whether she hadn’t realized she’d got to come back to me?”

Norris took out his pipe and laid it down. He was repudiating even that small assuaging influence. He wanted to be even-minded and unmoved.

“Charles,” said he, “your mother won’t do that. I sha’n’t do it. If you’ve offended Helen — given her cause — we’d rather she’d leave you than not. In fact —” Norris paused a moment, his strong distaste for Charles, by his very amazement at it, making him dumb. How could a father, his novel-writing habit of analysis challenged him to tell, how could a father feel for a son the condemnation he felt for Charles? He was inwardly persuaded Emily felt it, too, only that he could never go into, even in his nethermost mind, it was so palpably shocking to suspect a mother of spiritually repudiating the son of her body. “In fact,” he continued, determined, out of sheer bravado, to finish, “Helen’s always been a plaguy sight too good for you. And now — if you’ve given her cause —” Norris suddenly got on his feet, and ended



with a disgust he hadn't for a moment meant intemperately to show. "Damn it," he said — and the "it" was added because he suddenly had a rushing sense that he was going to damn Charles himself — "I'm ashamed of you."

Charles, too, got up and they stood there looking at each other, Norris with a sense of exultation he hadn't felt since the war began, since brooding on that limitation in the lives of men beyond which the old and physically weak have had to lament their inability to strike great blows and die deaths of anguish. Charles didn't answer. His face was black and ugly, and his father thought he was refraining because the things he had to say were blacker still. He turned and walked out of the room, and to his mother, waiting for him in the hall, he did not speak. Emily came on into the room where her husband still stood.

"Have you had any trouble?" she asked quickly, yet with her perfect quiet.

Norris recalled himself.

"Trouble?" said he. Then he laughed a little. The novelist's habit told him this was, judged by the standards of the inner life, a good deal of trouble. He had virtually damned Charles who was his son and he couldn't regret it.

"Well," said he, "it depends on what you call trouble. I told him we were standing by Helen."

"Yes," said Emily. She was absently brushing Charles's tobacco ash from the table. "Of course. That's what we've got to do."

## VIII

THE world may never have been so prolific in dreams as since the great war began. Fat, lush products, some of these dreams were, sprung from the miasma of hate and lust of power, and others sheltering trees, of the beauty of young men's sacrifice. There were the dreams of John and his gang. For them, as for the men dying in Europe, it was a young man's war. These four had, in the tumultuous beginning, taken themselves off to Canada, in a mad longing to enlist. What they could have expected, considering their most tragic limitations, they did not allow themselves to guess. But they went. It was in as unthinking a rush as if they had seen the first Hun murdering the first baby in Belgium. These were headlong lads, ready, before the great call came, to run and stumble and rejoice on the road of youth, never counting costs, always with the gleam before them and the pitfalls covered at their feet. Now, who should stay them? But Canada did stay them, with a kind precision. Finch had hardly thought, if he put his glasses in his pocket and went stumbling in, whether his myopic eyes would be held against him, and Brennan, convinced he had breath enough to curse the Hun, scarcely thought his unserviceable lung would prove his undoing, and Bailey, who felt the strength of ten, was furious at the flaws they found in him. And John, who had hated his lameness chiefly from its hostility toward brave sports, wouldn't admit it should cut him off from fighting. What was the use of a trench

if a lame man couldn't die in it? But there they were, insufficient, done for. They came back wilted, soured temporarily, before anybody knew they had gone. But they instantly came to life, assembled their scattered forces and considered. What could they do now? Could John fly? A cunningly devised gantlet of tests proved to him he could not. But as it became apparent that all the forces of evil were to lull the United States to a false security, they determined they would, having equal rights with prevailing pedagogy, set up for little schoolmasters. If they had no blood to give the world, they would give their brains. They would discard the highbrow literature they had been pursuing, throw it overboard, not worth keeping even for ballast, and be so impudent and so funny that nobody could afford not to read them. They didn't like this compromise of theirs. Youth doesn't want to spend itself in talk when it is straining to throw its whole bodily weight into the scale of deeds. They had a wholesome scorn of talk at this time, but it was their chosen and only activity to wallow in, to wipe out the insidious trail of false persuasion and high-sounding platitude.

These were not the only dreams the war engendered. Charles and men like him also had their dreams. Charles had always assumed that he was to live fatly, that he was to walk dashing along, setting his foot on impudent obstacles, to an unimagined goal of superb authority. He never really thought about the goal; his eyes were on the daily acquisitions that were taking him there. But now, when the curtain was rung up on the war, it disclosed the intimate scene which was to be his part therein. Suddenly there was born anew in him the lust for power. Why shouldn't he succeed, as well as another man, and succeed supremely? In this time of great shifting action, pan-

orama of the world's colossal values which were to bring whole nations into a blaze of splendor and cast down others to unimaginable depths, would not one man rather than another have the right to feel that his star, too, might blaze? Charles's dream was concrete; it had solid edges. And no wonder, for he had been offered definite bribes. He had no doubt that Germany was to triumph over her enemies—he called them, in the inner circle where the bribes were offered him, her enemies, as if they had long been conspiring against her, and referred always to the war that had been forced upon her. His reason told him she would be triumphant; persuasive lips also told him plainly what he was to get for working toward the coming triumph and, in all circumstances, holding his tongue. It is a little difficult to see how those lips, though smeared with guile, could have persuaded Charles so readily. Perhaps they half cajoled, half threatened; for he had shady paths in his life, overgrown now, he thought, with kind oblivion. He didn't want Helen to hear there ever were such paths, and even a month before the beginning of the war he considered Helen his, so literally that it would have been unthinkable disaster to be removed from her even to the point of trivial differences. The clever brains were following out an old German formula for setting up a spy in the business: to find out something damnatory in the spy's own life and hold it over him until you have made him take up the trade himself: a spiritual blackmail.

And why did the clever intelligences want Charles so much? How had they singled him out in his quiet eastern city? It was the nemesis of a dirty trick he had done in the market, a couple of years before, when some scores of his countrymen had got bitten, so that they, who also knew

Charles's nimble ways, admired while they damned him, and he got put on neat card catalogues that had been making for a long time in view of this coming of the Teuton wrath. No fry was too small for that card catalogue; and indeed Charles wasn't small fry at all. He was a marked man, recognized in sections far removed from his, as the sort of merchandise that, in any wreck, was bound to float. Men, when they were done by him, cursed him, but grinned sometimes as they did it, the job had been so neat, and he so impeccably on the side of legal uprightness and virtue. His father was wont to exclaim to himself, in despairing admiration, "Where the devil did he get that tongue?" And he knew. Charles had, like himself, the knack of words, only they not only flowed off the pen point but into the mould of fluent speech. Norris felt as if he had rashly given it to him, and when Charles persuaded somebody's dollars into his own pocket, Norris fought the shame of being somehow responsible.

And now Charles, to-night, shortly after his father had sent him away damned, came out of his own house and stood a minute thinking, while he tapped his stick on the pavement. He had started with a fully determined purpose of going to see Helen, of besieging her in the apartment which was her refuge, of arguing, of snatching her up bodily on the wings of persuasion and carrying her away from Jessie who, he persisted in telling himself, was the most dangerous enemy he had. He was inexorably determined that Helen should not take herself away from him. However he regarded her, she was necessary to the outer blamelessness of his private life. But his determination cooled in the night air and the solitude of the streets. He felt suddenly lonesome and old, he who had not yet reached the middle years. He wouldn't go to

her. He couldn't carry it through, and failure would be disastrous, worse than if he had attempted nothing. And with a man's mad rush of haste toward the woman who has always sympathized while she charmed and never blamed or bullied, he turned about and walked over to Mrs. Davenport's, the quiet subdued street where she had her big apartment over a shop. There she lived alone, a little maid coming in by day. There one and another whistled up her speaking tube and the door usually clicked for them; there midnight and long past midnight meetings went on where the matters preserved in the card catalogues were discussed, and pieces of human destiny were fitted together with fine precision. He whistled up the tube and gave his name. She was there, and when he went up the wide staircase that had once been magnificent but now echoed nakedly to his tread, he prayed his little gods she would be alone. And again his thoughts flew back to Helen. Did he love her still, or why was he so horribly disquieted in his solitary state without her? He could not have told. He only knew he was furious with her, and at the same time nervously shaken because she had gone.

He heard the opening of the door. Elsa — he hadn't the least belief that this was really her name — usually delayed until he rang; but now she was standing at the sill waiting for him, a slender, not very tall creature, with bright gold hair, ivory skin, and a dress of yellow satin, heavy with embroidery, that gave him a feeling of her being unreal, gold all through perhaps, a bizarre and wonderful toy made to beguile the forlornness of a man's life. As he came upon her, a bright gold fairy in her strange perfection, his need of her — or of something golden and not forlorn like his own miserable house — struck him with a pang, and he put his arms about her and drew her



to him roughly. She was not, fairy as she seemed, to be astonished by any move in the game of folly; but she had subtle ways of indicating a surprised reluctance. Did she love him? He had never been able, after he had left her, to assure himself by any evidence that stood the test of memory. Now she was not blushing or showing a heart's beat of confusion. One thing lay always between them, however rushing the tide of destiny was hurling them toward each other: her knowledge of the determination in his angry mind to drag his wife back to him. Yet they had never spoken of this. Only the woman, through some sensitiveness of her mercurial mind, was aware of it, and he felt in her the force of her ironic comment.

"Please!" she said, in a quick little whisper, and somehow was outside the rough encircling—he didn't quite see how. She did everything with a swift grace and cleverness; and he was made to feel at once that however he might stretch his mind to ultimate and practical avowals, they were not to be now. So they went in together and she took his hat and stick and then gave them back to him in a pretty, intimate way and showed him where he was to put them. It was his place. When he came and she wasn't there—she said a dozen beguiling things in the course of a minute to show him it was his place. And while they still stood and he had put out his hand for hers, because the pretty palm of it he must have if her lips were not to be besieged in this first minute, a falsetto cry and a chuckle came from the next room, and the voice of the cry called mockingly:

"O law! law! what a fuss!"

Elsa laughed and took away her hand. Impossible to be gracefully amorous with a parrot jeering at you in the next room.



"I believe that bird is the devil," said Charles, who had a memory of kindred interruptions accurately timed. "Why can't you throw a black thing over his cage — if you won't throttle him?"

"Poor Polly!" said Elsa, "my only company after you're gone. You ought to be grateful to poor Polly."

So they sat down together, he in the most comfortable of chairs a man could wish, and he lighted up.

Then the whole thing came over him, the vision of his lost home still etched upon his mind and this present paradise he shared with a dozen others, for all he knew, and he asked bitterly:

"Now — what am I going to get out of it all?"

It was one of her strangenesses that she never went straight to crucial points. There were obliquities in her reassurances, always in the straightest and most irreproachable of words. And so she fascinated the more and drew him on the faster. If she had said to him: "In five years, after all the great downfalls, you and I are going to live together with unlimited money and power among the conquerors," he might have laughed at her. Instead she told him he was to be rewarded, and looked at him. And now as she told him so again, in one form or another, and he knew what Teuton tongue had assured her of it, he was suddenly engulfed in a wave of jealous hatred.

"Look here," he said, "what's he been to you?"

She sat up straight in her chair. Her nostrils dilated as if she felt scorn — was it of him or the other man? — and her long golden lashes were two shining lines.

"You're not to ask me those things," she said.

But now he was suddenly drunk with anger against her and the chamber of mystery that closed her in.

"What's he been to you? I've got to know." But

she continued looking at him, and he saw she would not answer. The terrible inaccessibility of women — some women — came over him and inspired him with a sickness of rage. Helen was inaccessible in her silences. This woman in — what? “If you won’t tell me that,” he said, “what is he to you now? Now, I say. Tell me that. It’s only decent.”

Then she did answer.

“Nothing,” clearly, though disdainfully, as it might be of him, and he said:

“Then come over here and kiss me.”

And she came. She left her chair and went over to him like a fairy child and gave him a kiss of Circe. But she went back to her seat again with such an indefinable air of old weariness that, though he rose to follow her, he dropped back into his own place.

“Now,” she said. He had never heard her voice keyed to such resonant force. “We can talk.”

Something was accomplished, she had paid him a little on account, and they could talk. But he wouldn’t talk about Helen. He never had tolerated a word about her yet. There were unconscious inhibitions, perhaps fruit of the Tracy tree from which he seemed to be such an alien offshoot. Proprieties, they were, accepted moral standards that made a part of his personal self-importance.

“You are,” she said, “to buy out the *Republican Voice*.”

He was taken completely by surprise.

“They won’t sell,” he objected. “They’d laugh at me. They’re as old as Boston.”

“They will sell,” she said. “They’re on their last legs. Don’t you remember that young nephew business? He was no good. He drew a salary and spent it on chorus

girls. You remember the libel suit he got the paper into and how the old subscribers dropped off? They couldn't countenance it. And the *Voice* managed to pull through. But now they're in mud they can't draw their legs out of. We've bought up their notes and we're worrying them. Oh, they'll sell."

"Then what?" he asked.

"You're to see Marshall to-morrow. He's the head of the clan. It was his nephew that landed them in the soup. You're to meet every objection. The policy of the paper — you'll continue that. They're said to have cast-iron ideas of what Boston owes them and they owe Boston. And then" — she dropped her air of rounded finality and smiled at him — "then I'll tell you what comes next."

He was unused to being led. He wanted to follow, at least ostensibly, his own road.

"I suppose," he suggested ironically, "I'm to be told what I am to pay."

"Precisely. What you are to offer and what you are finally to pay. You are to open an account in another bank — not your present one — and money will be transferred there from New York."

"Directly?"

"No. It will have made a good many journeys before it gets to you. But you needn't be afraid. These people here aren't going to investigate anything — at least not till it's too late."

"Here? Boston? They won't investigate?"

"Boston — America. Nothing doing." She smiled, scornfully, but as if she didn't blame anybody for criminal negligence. She had gone very far on the road where every man is for himself. But he had a question to ask her. It affected his standing in his inner mind. Why was

he passed over to her to be instructed? Had he got to be charmed and wheedled by a woman? Couldn't they talk to him man to man, offer their bribes and let him answer in cold blood?

"Why," said he, "does all this come through you? Don't they trust me yet? God knows, I've done enough for 'em."

She looked at him a moment with merry eyes. She didn't have to consider an instant. She knew the answer and why he asked for it.

"Dear man," she said, "you're difficult."

The implication pleased him.

"Why am I?" His self-importance, tickled, felt momentarily like self-respect.

"You're so positive. You know exactly what you mean to say and do. If you turned them down and left the whole thing in the air, where would they be then? I saw that. I said to them, 'I'll do it.'"

"Why did you?"

He knew she was humoring him, definitely and with a purpose of her own, but he liked the resultant warmth between them and he couldn't blame her for having played upon him. A politician himself, should he not accept expediency in another?

"Because," she said, "I knew you."

"Oh, come," he threw in clumsily, "that's no reason."

Where was the wile of his clever tongue? With her the knack of it was quite lost as it had been with Helen for the last year, at least. Yet there was a difference. To Helen he was curt and even savage because he was aware he no longer pleased and his vanity was sore. This woman he tremulously desired to please too much. She left her chair and came over to him and drew another to

his knee. Then she sat facing him so near that he could feel the warmth of her breath, and her eyes, the transparent veined beauty of them, were like jewels seen near by.

"I knew," she said, "I could make you understand this isn't merely buying a paper. It's a step to where we're going, up — up — we don't want to say how high." She laughed. "We mustn't get dizzy. And they've been square with you. It isn't payment for what you've done already. The tip I gave you a year ago — well, you realized something out of that, now didn't you?"

He nodded at her. He couldn't speak. She seemed to be drawing him, his will, his hope of some sort of angry bliss with her, into that locked seclusion of her actual intent he never yet had entered.

"We are going," she said, and she beat out the words softly with one small hand upon his that lay upon his knee, "we are, you and I, to be rich. What you cleaned up a year ago is nothing — nothing. We're to be powerful, to be famous. And I said I was the one to tell you that because I speak your language."

"Do you," he asked thickly, forgetting his sharp misery over her mental inaccessibility. "By God! I believe you do."

And suddenly she had left him, in her noiseless way, and was standing against the background of the green silk curtains. For an instant he felt light-headed and fancied Helen was there, too. He never quite forgot Helen. Either she was there as a torment or as an enemy because she had walked away from him. And Elsa was telling him to go. She was tired, she said. Standing there, grasping the curtain with one hand like an actress come out to take applause — or like an artless child, according as you in-

terpreted — she looked appealing, wan. He got up and went to her.

“No,” she said, “I’m tired. Don’t you realize — though we do speak the same language — oh, yes, we do! — it’s no small thing to keep up with a man like you? To try to make you do things! Yes, I did try. It’s absurd, a small person like me. But I do so want you to come into this newspaper deal, to keep on being one of us. I can’t” — she looked away from him now as if she actually must not trust her eyes to the encounter, “I can’t go on without you.”

There was silence for what seemed to him a long time. He could hear her little ornate clock ticking like a hurrying heart. “Come,” the little clock seemed to be calling to him, “hurry! hurry! Here’s the prize we’re running for, and if you don’t enter for it somebody’ll be before you and snatch it up.”

Then he did speak.

“Yes,” he said, “I’m with you. Tell ’em yes.”

And, feeling the will of her pushing him to go, he got his hat and coat and was returning to her. But she came into the hall, and though pale, she looked to him relieved. He might reasonably have built greedy hopes on his own contributory part in her relief, but a black suspicion suddenly settled on him, out of nowhere, and he asked her:

“Is anybody coming here to-night?”

Her brows went up a little in deprecation, though not rebuke.

“No,” she said, “not a soul.” But she added guilelessly, “are you going to her?”

“Who?” he asked, frowning. He had drawn it on himself. If he had the right to jealous question, hadn’t she the same?

“Your wife,” she answered quietly, and for a moment he looked at her, wondering what fiend it was in women that kept them perversely lashing you when you thought you were making a good pace on plain ground. But he had to answer.

“No;” he said, “I’m not.”

He opened the door and was in the hall, and she put out a hand from what now seemed again her safe seclusion.

“Then ——” she said. And he took her hand and kissed it. Again she had him. But he went and paced up and down for over an hour, watching the house, and before she drew her curtain she saw him and smiled — and this was not the smile that would have drawn men to her in the piquing thought of ancient sorceries.



## IX

EVERY forenoon Norris worked for the French Wounded, and every afternoon, with what freshness he had left, he wrote on his new novel. If he didn't keep on at his petty task while the great deeds far off were doing, he felt he should go under. Yet who wanted his novel when it was done? He knew precisely the recipe to suit the public. Could he write an adventure story? He wished he could, but it was beyond him. What was more to be desired, in these times of clamor, than a story to take the mind out of the horrible and heroic present — equally compounded, this day of dread and splendor — into the tracts, even the gins and pitfalls, under the sun of gay romance? But he actually couldn't do it. When he tried to vault into the saddle of robust invention, he came down with a bump. His evil genius of the inner criticism, that goblin who withholds a man from doing his best because it laughs at him and tells him the world, too, will laugh, was never absent from his elbow. And if the world couldn't have its adventure story Norris knew precisely what it did want. It wanted a warming sentiment, a tale that would take it out of this disquieting time and lull it with some of the fallacies that clog the muscles and arrest the blood and assert God is going to do something ultimately, even if man does nothing. It wanted to be snatched out of the encampment of suspense, of anguish where he and men like him were suffering some of the most horrible pangs of the war because they could do, it seemed, nothing appreciable for it. They were sweating blood, but that was

nothing compared with the cataract they longed to pour into the sacrificial torrent.

It had not done him much good to come up here and live nearer his kind, and now he thought, with scorn of himself, that he didn't want it to abate one jot of his suffering. It was the only decency, while his brothers were being slaughtered Over There, to think nothing and dream of nothing but war. Everything less was defection from them whose blood was availing, as his could not. He wondered what his wife thought about it all. She said little unless she was interrogated; she did her daily tasks with a precision that had always made her housekeeping a loveliness and a charm, and after that folded compresses and knit with a swift intentness. She sat with committees and took orders faithfully. Very ready she was to talk about her house affairs or a walk into the sunset, or even about the concert — for Emily had a nice sense of values and was no purveyor of small things — but of the tragedy that was welding her own life into new shapes she had no word to say. And his father — what was his father thinking about the war, Norris wondered, sitting there in his enforced seclusion, whimsical, profane, according as his affliction allowed him to meet the world? He knew how his father stood as to the great issue; but did his father actually suffer? Or had he got into that zone of calm where all may not be for the best in the best of all possible worlds, but is for the best in a universe compounded of enormous distances? He didn't know. And one night as he sat at his table pretending to write on the new novel and marking time, whipping up impetus by letting himself go in a sea of platitude, John came up the stairs. He knew his irregular step far below, but he could not think John was coming up to see him because of that unformulated rule

of the house that when he was at work he was not be interrupted. John came on and, not even pausing for permission, walked in at the open door. Norris at once laid down his pen. There was trouble in John's face, the frowning consideration of a worry not yet fully understood.

"Did you know," he began, and, regardless of his father's littered desk and the pen still wet in his hand, threw himself into a chair at the other side of the table, "did you know Charles had bought the *Republican Voice*?"

"Charles?" repeated his father. Now he carefully wiped his pen and laid it down in a definitive way that said "I sha'n't need you again to-night." "Bought the *Voice*? He couldn't have. Where'd he get his money?"

"Where he got it to buy this house, I suppose, if it's no worse," said John, as if it were an accusation, and he was passionately throwing it at his father who happened to be there to receive it and because he couldn't get at Charles. "Where'd he get that?"

"Why, he told us," said Norris. "He told me, at least. In the market."

"Yes. He had a tip. Where'd he get it?" demanded John inexorably.

"Now look here," said his father irritably, "you mustn't get Charles on your nerves and conclude he's gone to the bad because he's — well, not exactly your kind." This he said the more captiously because he, too, was wondering how Charles really did get his money, and banging himself for his own sad doubts of him.

"Oh, all right," said John. "I've nothing to say — yet — about the way he made his money. He's bought the *Voice*, that's all."

"How'd you know it?" asked Norris, in much interest.

"It's out to-day. The *Voice*'ll announce it to-morrow. And it's going to say the policy of the paper remains unchanged. Now what do you think of that?"

"Well, won't it?"

"Under Charles? Why, ask yourself, father. Charles is peace at any price. You know that. And you know what the *Voice* has stood for ever since the war begun."

"Well," said Norris, "I wish Charles would come in. I'd like to hear what he's got to say."

"He'll say enough," said John. "He's got hold of Brennan already. Finch, too, and Bailey, but Brennan's the big loss. His cartoons carry."

"Got hold of Brennan?"

"Yes. Don't you remember the day Charles met them here, Brennan and Finch and Bailey, and he asked us all to dinner?"

"Yes. You wouldn't go."

"He must have had some such scheme in his mind, and now he's approached Brennan alone and asked him to do cartoons for the paper and hypnotised him, some underground way, and Brennan's agreed to do it. Asked him to bring in Finch and Bailey and he did that, too."

"Brennan needn't stay with him any longer than he likes."

"Ah, but he's signed an agreement. So've they all. They're to give the *Voice* all their work, and I bet you Charles is at liberty to throw out what he pleases."

"He won't throw it out," said Norris. "Brennan's too valuable to go into the discard. And if he's to be paid anything considerable —"

"Oh, he gets big money," said John, looking off into the distance through the wall opposite — he had these ways of

losing himself in unseen reaches of the mind — “Brennan never earned so much in his whole life as Charles is going to give him for one month. I don’t mean that was what tempted him. And I shouldn’t say tempted. Charles simply explained the policy of the paper and Brennan concluded it was all right.”

“Well, and isn’t it all right?” Norris asked, against his own convictions.

“You know Charles, father. So do I. What else do we know?”

“But,” said Norris, “what about your scheme, that famous scheme you had, the unknown anonymous backer, the little room here at the West End and showers of propaganda?”

“That,” said John bitterly, “is another thing that goes into the discard. Unless I take it over and carry it myself.”

“But those boys were as keen about it as you were.”

“Oh, yes, but Charles got them, don’t you see? he simply got them. He rushed them, as I understand. He made them believe something or other — you know Charles can make you believe black is white until you’ve proved it a few times and found it isn’t — and they signed on.”

“Now what did he really make them believe?”

“Larger sphere of usefulness, some such rot. And made them feel mighty lucky to get in on the ground floor. Told them, for instance, I was coming in, too.”

Norris sat for a moment also staring through the wall into invisible distances.

“John,” said he then, “you go down and telephone Charles. Ask him to run over. Tell him I want to see him.”

John got up in haste as if he thought something might

now be doing. He was not often so anxious to summon Charles.

"And mind," his father called after him, "you're not to get into any trouble. I won't have you boys scrapping the way you did the other day."

John possibly did not hear. At any rate, there was no answer, and his father thought, with a rueful amusement, how tenuous the thread of paternal influence wears with time. He sat there and waited for Charles to appear or for John to come back and tell him the message didn't go through. And then he heard the front door and his two sons in a brief remark as they came up the stairs. Charles appeared first, and he was as beautiful a spectacle as a personable man can present in his evening clothes and with something appropriately anticipatory in his manner, as if the dress had been donned, not in the ordinary habit of conventional life, but for an eagerly awaited event. Seeing his face, Norris jumped first at the inference that Helen had taken him back. Then, knowing Helen also, he dismissed that and reasoned that Charles had something of his own advantage in view, and was on the road to it. Charles took the seat John had vacated and John found one in the background where, his father thought, he could glower unnoted. Norris began at once.

"Charles, they tell me you've bought the *Voice*."

Charles was unused to sharing his business confidences with the family, but now he looked at his father expansively. There was no limit, his smile seemed to say, to what he was prepared to tell.

"And I'm editor in chief," he announced. "I'm awfully keen on it, too."

"Have you discharged Brice?" John inquired from his corner. "Brice is the present editor, father."



"Oh, Brice wouldn't fit in," said Charles. "We want new blood."

"Well, you've got it now you've got Brennan," said John, "if you give him a free hand."

"Oh, he'll have a free hand," said Charles. "You'd have a free hand, too, if you'd come in."

"I?" said John. "Not on your life. I believe in all the things you don't. The things you're standing for I hate with all my soul."

"Now come," said Charles, giving his father the slightest possible smile indicating the extent to which they both understood the intemperate mind of youth, "what do you know about the things I believe in?"

"I know better what you don't believe in," said John. "You don't believe in preparing for war. You'd have us sit down and twiddle our thumbs while Germany licks us over before she swallows us. You believe in different brands of peace—I don't know which is the worse—peace at any price, peace twiddled over and negotiated. And it isn't because you're pro-German or pro-anything but pro-Charles."

"O Lord!" breathed Norris.

He wished he had let Charles go his own way. Here they were again, scrapping. But Charles was not going to scrap. He looked unmoved, except that he smiled tolerantly in a manner of again reminding his father to consider the intemperate mind of youth, the while it mildly censured John.

"Oh, come, John," he said, "cut it out. You're too clever to believe a man has got to keep on being what he's been once. Circumstances have changed. I don't believe in conscription. I don't want to fight. War is —"

"Don't tell me war is hell," interrupted John. "I can't



bear it once more. You pin that up among your editorial 'don'ts'. Dad and I are pretty parochial, but even we've heard it several times already."

Charles went on.

"I begin to see we've got to be prepared. Possibly we shall have to fight. Now you can't ask any more of me than to acknowledge I've been wrong. And I'm going to carry on the *Voice* precisely on its old lines. Won't that satisfy you?"

"It would," said John, "if I believed it."

"Oh, come," said Charles, with an unblemished good-nature, "you're the most ill-conditioned cub I ever saw. Don't you call it discouraging, father? I meet him the best I know how, and he tells me I lie. I think it speaks well for me not to give him a biff."

John got up, and, with a studied offensiveness of silence, went out of the room. Again Charles turned to his father.

"I'll tell you what," he said, in an apparent spontaneity his father informed himself he had to accept — it wasn't decent not to — "it makes me sore as thunder to have all of you down on me."

Norris, out of the instinctive working of family decency, was about to deny half-heartedly that the family was down on him. But this matter of the paper he couldn't talk out. Charles seemed to have a specious side of his own; but then he always did have. Norris countered on another issue where he knew his ground more nearly.

"Have you seen Helen?"

And this time Charles didn't frown and glower as he had that first night. It was impossible to move his expansive calm.

"How could I?" he asked. "She won't see me. How

can I square things with her if she won't give me a chance? "

"Going anywhere to-night?" asked his father.

"No."

"Then why not telephone her and ask if you mayn't go over and fetch her here for a little talk? "

This Norris said against his preconceived intent; but he had a wobbly consciousness that if Charles really did mean well — even so suddenly and after every reason to believe he didn't — he must be given a chance. But Charles wasn't ready to close on such an offer.

"Not to-night," he said. "I'm not up to it."

This was in the face of his look of radiant expectancy, and his father immediately knew he was going to some desired end.

"Well," said he, "I won't keep you."

Charles got up, and, having taken a step, turned back again.

"I wish," he said, "you'd get some sense into John's head."

"What kind of sense? John seems to me moderately clever — in his work, he is."

"He's infernally clever. They all are. That's why I want 'em on the *Voice*. I'm prepared to spend any amount on 'em."

Norris wasn't going into that. He knew John would snatch at it if only he might accept his brother's good faith. But he couldn't. Nobody could, in the family, where they had known him from the beginnings of his desires and his tortuous ways of coming at them. So Charles went away to Mrs. Davenport where she already sat awaiting him with two men of a shaven countenance and mean, shrewd, mouths, who had come on from New York to see him. And

that evening he had full instructions, which came to him in the form of tactful requisitions, and money passed between them.

Norris sat for a long time thinking about him. What if he could write out the soul of Charles? Would the public, which craved the warmth and light and foolish ragtime of a childish day, respect it as realism, and take the trouble to probe it with him? He thought not. Charles's soul, difficult as it would be to paint, in all its glares and shadows — sinister, some of them — would be an absorbing thing to tackle. It was the soul of the politician, and Norris had begun to reflect seriously on the soul of the politician, as on the soul of the tyrant. He was beginning to understand them and he saw that the politician, in the secondary and debased form of the word, is a criminal of a low type. He is a man who has ceased asking himself, "Is this right or is it wrong?" He is a man who acts because he has weighed the end in view and what contributes to it — and the end is always his own advancement. His vision is oblique. He sees, not the world in its sane reality as it looks to honest eyes, but as it is translated into the game. And this was Charles, who could be all things to all men because all men were the instruments of his power. No, clearly nobody would want to read about the petty chicanery of Charles's soul. But dwelling on him he began thinking of Helen, also, who had been caught in the wizardry of his son's persuasion and had, with a silent decisiveness amazing in its force and calmness, thrown it off. Did he want Charles to go to her, to threaten or persuade? Assuredly not. He began to fear Charles was already there, besieging her door with soft assurances that would harden if she let him in, and he went down to the telephone and called her up.

“You all right?” he asked her, “Helen of the topless towers?”

“All right,” came her voice. “Jessie and I are folding compresses.”

So he said good-night. When he was going back to his room Emily appeared and called up the stairs to him:

“He won’t go there. I’m sure he won’t.”

Norris went on to his room, smiling. He was never irritated by Emily’s uncanny habit of reading his mind, chiefly because she usually read in silence and seemed to draw no conclusions. But did she draw conclusions and softly act upon them? Grandsir, smiling in a reticence of his own, thought she did.

## X

ONE of the compensating details in this apartment Jessie had taken was that it had fireplaces of an ancient build. Before the fire in the sitting-room, a table between them, sat the two sisters, working absorbedly and saying little. Jessie was in blue and Helen in white — soft house dresses that clothed their fresh beauties fittingly, and gave the mind to think on delicate morning lovelinesses, the convolvulus or the rose. They were moderately content to-night, in the surroundings they had made for themselves, because, for some reason, they were not at the extreme tension they felt ordinarily in these strange times. It was of no use for Helen to say she was not afraid of her husband. She was apprehensive,—that he would come, that there would be the violence of reproach and persuasion, and that, having once entered these rooms, he could never be made to go without some huge outcry and misery. For Jessie, too, he was always imminent. When Helen came back from the telephone where she had answered Norris, she was smiling in a moved, tender way.

“Dear things, all of them,” she said. “Aren’t they good to me? If they weren’t — ”

“Have you talked to them?” Jessie ventured.

She hadn’t been talked to herself. It was getting hard to wait, to realize Charles might be upon them at any moment and she would have to fight him off unintelligently,

knowing he had lost Helen and yet not how he had lost her. Jessie was impatient of veils. She repudiated the assumption that, because she was younger than Helen and unmarried, she was to be shielded from the knowledge of evil. Women were in the thick of it now, young women. You couldn't save them altogether from the blows and abrasions of life. Why try to deny them knowledge of the terrible game?

"I talked a little — to grandsir," said Helen. She was folding absorbedly. "The time I went alone."

Then they folded in silence, and Jessie, not asking, wished Helen would talk to her. Yet it was a magnificent point of honor not to ask. She wanted especially to show her sister how loyal she was to her, beyond reason, with no argument from fact. And Helen had seen the moment nearing when she must, in common fairness, give Jessie the key to some of the perplexities they would have to meet together. Because Jessie, having come, was not going away again. She had sacrificed tremendously in coming. She had rushed to her work in France over towering difficulties, trodden them down, cast them behind her in a rage of determination, and then, having heard the call of Helen's need, she had turned her back on France. It was a big thing, her sacrifice, and a silent one.

"I suppose," said Helen, "you think it's time I said something."

"Not unless you want to," Jessie answered readily. "It's only the question whether I should be of more use to you —"

Helen leaned back in her chair, arms stretched out straight and her delicate, eloquent hands, fitted to an accuracy of motion, on the work table. Suddenly she looked pathetically tired, her face paler and blue shadows under

her eyes. Jessie glanced up at her and was smitten with the wholesale self-reproach of love.

"Don't do it, Nell," she said. "I don't care about being told. Go and lie down and I'll read to you."

"I don't want to lie down," said Helen, "and I don't want to be read to. I'd like to tell you things, but I can't. I'm trying to behave myself, but sometimes I'm afraid I sha'n't keep it up. I want to be exactly as you've all known me; but there are minutes when I'm so wild — that's the only word I can think of — wild inside me somehow, that I'm afraid I shall break out and do queer things. You know, those things they do on the stage aren't so queer, after all: breaking down uncontrollably, the things we watch from the audience and tell whether we think they're done well or not, and look to see what the critics say next morning. But those things are life, and they're just as normal as eating your dinner, if you allow yourself to get to a certain point. And I'm afraid I'm getting there."

She spoke with emphasis, yet it was perfectly controlled, and Jessie, who was frightened to the last inner fibre for her, was alarmed the more by that. But she did not interrogate her even by a glance. She went on folding, with painstaking care, though she was seeing her work dimly and could not be sure her fingers might not tremble presently.

"I don't believe," she said quietly, "it's a good thing to keep such a terrible hold on ourselves. Maybe it's better to let yourself go. Talk it out. If you can't with me, why not grandsir or Mrs. Tracy?"

"Oh, no," said Helen quickly. "Not that. At least, not yet. I couldn't."

"You're too loyal, Nell."



"I'm not loyal," said Helen violently. "You can't imagine how different I am from what I thought I was. I'm entirely different from what you think."

Jessie went on folding.

"I wish," she said at length, "we could use our common sense. Somebody said, you know, if we all used common sense there'd be no tragedies."

"There are tragedies," said Helen. "You can't keep them off by wearing a veil and saying you won't look at them."

But now she seemed to get back her composure. The runaway horse, Jessie saw, was coming under the curb. Helen even laughed a little.

"I'm on edge," she said, and she began her folding. "I've got to keep busier, that's all."

"You've got to go back to France with me," said Jessie quietly. "There we shouldn't have time to think."

Helen said nothing, and Jessie's mind inevitably leaped to other daring moments when she had urged her to sit down and definitely plan for France. And always Helen had put her off, and once told her explicitly and violently that it was impossible until she had settled things here. What things? Jessie asked her, and again she was dumb. An exasperating creature, but dear beyond belief.

That night Jessie, on the alert for the smallest sound to tell her Helen was also awake and quivering under the lash that flicked her, thought back to the Helen of other years, a creature of such sweet household ways that you wanted to enthrone her at your hearth, and such little tricks of genius that you wondered whether she might not have done one or another thing in the arts supremely well. She had an easy cleverness with the pen and brush, she caught at languages in a careless mastery, speaking them, not so

much with an impeccable correctness as a fluidity and spirit that delighted the native born. And all this wealth of sheer intellectual and intuitive ease had been poured into the cup she lifted daily for Charles to drink. He had somehow — or was it her love for him? — quenched these tricky activities, the gay adaptabilities that made her such a comrade, such a playfellow. Had he indeed quenched them, or did she, out of generous thrift, keep her fine vintage sealed from the world outside the marital tent and only broach it when my lord would be amused and called upon his handmaid? Jessie thought not, as to this last. Charles, she thought, with all his subtleties of intelligence in the game of moving men, was a stupid person. No, Helen had been extinguished like a candle by the cap of his dull wits. And now what was she? Outwardly the same in looks, a little older but not much, smiling with a less fitful radiance but no less sweetly, and yet changed. Something had come upon her, apprehension, the shadow of an inward brooding. Jessie was troubled. Her own task of standing by Helen loomed very large.

## XI

IF Jessie could have been more tender of Helen, more secretly watchful over her comfort, this hesitating half confidence would have made her so. And though it was no real disclosure, she was grateful for it and traced over and over in memory the blurred edges of it. Its implications might have fitted one of half a dozen guesses. At least, Helen had shut herself up in this retreat her necessities had chosen, to think out her riddle, the big riddle, whatever it was, that had made her throw over the household gods and fly from the ruin of them. Were the gods really broken in their overturn, or might they sometime be lifted by tender, perhaps remorseful hands, and set up again? Jessie forbade herself to wish. Nevertheless, at instants of savage condemnation of Charles who, in whatever fashion, had surely brought about the overturn, she still longed for the moment when Helen should make her decision, swift, irrevocable, and they two could run away from it all, to France. Jessie was every day more madly anxious to get back. In the hidden house of her mind where Helen was never allowed to come now, lest the uneasiness there disquiet her, she was always weaving plans for their escape, her hands ready at the wires to pull. But meantime there must be the stillest tranquillity in this present refuge, Helen's purpose must crystallize without a jar. Sometimes when Jessie sat with her at their deft folding and counting, she had quick, wild impulses to sweep the board of this orderly service and break out with the

things she had seen, things that were going on now with a horribly increased momentum because the ocean of blood had risen higher and the rocks of defense were more and more submerged, to beg Helen to throw her own personal grief, whatever it was, into the abyss of unconsidered things and come with her to help. But she would look at her then, the pale remoteness of her, the something inaccessible in her isolation, and decide again that it really was a guarded shrine. Perhaps Helen had no right to keep one woman, or two women, indeed, out of France; but when your eyes met hers, you felt she had, from some inner task she was brooding on, an unassailable claim to her immunity.

One morning Jessie left her at the table and went off out of doors — to do errands, she said. But it was really because energies were seething in her that could not be put into gauze, however fervently folded. Her feet had to be carrying her somewhere and tire themselves into patience, since they couldn't be allowed to bear her off to France. Helen, left alone, went on with her work at the table. She knew precisely how Jessie felt, and her own feet were begging for at least a trot across the Common, since she couldn't let them go to France, couldn't let them run up the street to that house which had once been her home. Was it her home still? Should she have fulfilled the old wifely ideal and stood by, or had she a right to this interval of isolation to think out the question that would have been decided by a woman of more impetuous judgment in the moment when the gods crashed down? Helen often thought how it would have been decided in a play, the threads of uncertainty tied up in a third act and gently extricated and woven into the web of destiny in the fourth. In the play it could all have been determined in a cry — a

“line” — the one the actress would have relied on for her big effect. Impossible to get any help from Jessie, any more than from the family, because Jessie was so obstinately set against Charles. Her impetuous mind was probably now racing after him, accusing him, spinning webs of conjecture, fitting piece to piece in the puzzle she thought she held, since their talk, actually in her hands. She would be more than ready to run him down and throttle him with impulsive retribution, and Helen would neither countenance the vengeful pursuit nor could she forbid it as once she would have done when she was so identified with him that defence was a vital duty as natural as the body’s rallying to its own preservation. The effort of sifting what she could tell from what was to be withheld had exhausted her. She hardly knew where she stood, neither wholly false nor “falsely true.”

To her, this morning after Jessie had gone out, came the maid, announcing:

“Mrs. Davenport.”

The surprise of the name was complete, the shock so sharp that she stopped folding and looked up in a helpless query. An undercurrent of feeling told her she had brought this on herself by even accepting the woman’s name from grandsir. They had conjured her up. So unconsciously had she identified her with Charles that she had a foolish apprehension the woman had come to tell her something had happened to him. The name held such unknown import that it was itself a challenge, and after her moment of staring, while the maid, in a simple wonder, stared back at her, she said quietly:

“Ask her to come in.”

Immediately, it seemed, Mrs. Davenport was there, almost before Helen could rise to meet her. And as Helen

saw her now for the first time, she was not the exotic creature a wronged wife might have predicted, but an exquisitely complete figure in a dress suited to the morning, her face dwelling demurely behind the propriety of a veil perfectly put on, and the expression of it grave, open and slightly interrogatory.

"It's so good of you to see me," she said, in a direct manner and, though it was not ingratiating, almost, Helen thought, with a grim humor, as if she had something to sell. But Helen had no answer to this, certainly no disclaimer, only a courteous indication of the chair she had just left, turning it about from the work-table. Elsa seated herself and Helen took the chair opposite and sat, with hands in her lap, in an attitude of that unconscious, even sumptuous, grace and elegance the woman of a good height and a loose slenderness adopts without effort. Elsa, seeing her for the first time at close hand, had a slightly bitter, yet humorous, recognition of Helen's equipment. Although she had long ceased to cry for the moon of unattainable graces, she remarked inwardly that the woman with a length of limb always has the best of it. Then she addressed herself to her errand, speaking concisely, soberly and with a restraint which was in itself beguiling.

"I've come to tell you something. But it must not be repeated."

Helen sat still, looking at her. She couldn't promise that. She couldn't promise anything to a woman who had so little right to ask it. And the next thing Mrs. Davenport said was inconceivable in its directness:

"You are not living with your husband."

It was a statement, not a question, and Helen sat and looked at her. It seemed to her of the highest importance that she should say nothing, that she should not offer,



by the quiver of an eyelash, a response to a statement so preposterously personal. But to Elsa it was apparently a matter of no importance that she had not been answered. She continued, with a direct and grave composure, an implication of having every reason to speak and therefore the right to do it.

"The thing I'm going to tell you is about myself. And you mustn't repeat it, even to your sister. If I told you what none of my friends know yet — " She paused, and her yellow-brown eyes fixed themselves on Helen's with an imperiousness that said: "Attend to me. Attend. It is of the gravest consequence that you should listen, for you as well as for me."

And Helen felt, with a sickness of strained inner emotion, that she had got to attend. Something demanded it. Was it real, an actual necessity, or was it the woman's insistence and her gold-brown eyes?

"If I told you," said Elsa, "that I am working for the Department of Justice, would you talk with me then? "

"Department of Justice? "

"Secret service, if you like. Then would you talk? "

"I am listening," said Helen.

Her heart was choking her. Strange possibilities swam into sight, things that belonged on another plane from this where she and the woman confronted each other. She felt something new and menacing in the air, something that threatened her. What did the woman know about her or, having the confidence of Charles, what did she guess? Elsa smiled at her, in a frank amusement.

"You listen," she said, "but you don't mean to speak. You're not going to tell me anything. But I'm being square with you. I'm not trying to lead you on, like the detectives in the books. I'm introducing myself and



trusting you not to give me away. And now I'm going to ask you a plain question. Why did you leave your husband? "

Helen might, if she could have anticipated this interview, have seen herself repelling the question with haughtiness, possibly with some of the words vivid in accepted formulæ. Unwarrantable! insolent! these were two of the words. But she was not inclined to use them or their like. She sat stiller, if that could be, and looked at her visitor in a grave consideration. She had no idea she should answer. But as the seconds beat on into minutes she found that, for some reason, she had to. Perhaps it seemed that Mrs. Davenport also was going to sit there immovable, the gold-brown eyes fixed on hers, to an interminable limit of nervous tension, until they were interrupted, it might be possibly until Jessie came home.

"I can't tell you that," she heard herself answering.

And Mrs. Davenport, with her impregnable air of continuing a conversation not in the least eccentric, went on:

"Tell me then: did you leave him for any reason connected with his public activities? Did you — suspect him? "

This was what the woman meant then. She mistrusted Charles and had come to Charles's wife to discover what she also knew. It was incredible; but Helen could not feel it was impossible, for the strangest things had taken on the garb of probability since she had been separated from Charles. And something had to be said. She rose from her chair, and stood waiting, while Elsa thought how beautiful she was, and how irresistible a woman of that noble type could be if she would learn all the rules of all the games. But she only smiled at Helen, a little humorous, quizzical smile.

"I know," she said. "That means I'm dismissed. I don't want to be. Give me a minute more. Tell me, do you know anything about your Charles the government needs to use? If you're a patriotic lady, you'll speak up."

But Helen stood still and said nothing. Her hand, her left hand, on the back of the chair, did not tremble, and Elsa, looking for that sign of disquietude, noted that it still wore its wedding ring. At least, whatever the implication, she had retained that token of allegiance. Elsa rose now, outwardly rueful but still good-humored to the last degree.

"I'm sorry," she said. "It's really necessary for me to know something about him. It'll save him trouble, too. You see you've kicked up an awful row. It's known you've left him. The next question is — why? He's said to be faithful to you. Therefore, again, why? If there's no woman in the case, there must be something. And the question is then, is he crooked? Does his wife know it? Is that why she cut? And then I'm put on to shadow him, as they say, and I have to see a great deal more of him than I want to — or than he may want me to — and that kicks up another scandal. 'Mrs. Davenport, the newspaper woman, running round with Charles Tracy. So that's why his wife's left him! My dear! how hard for the family.'"

Helen made a little movement of the hand, as if to beg her not to bring in the dear family. And Elsa understood it so.

"Oh," she said, "we can't let up on the family. They've got to be hauled out of their precious old seclusion to answer questions about him. I hear they've come and brought their dear, nice country ways with them. Can't

you save them? Why won't you tell me what you know?"

Helen felt she could answer with a decent composure now.

"I haven't anything," she said, "to tell you."

She heard her voice coming from far away in that commonplace which was, she knew, the only response this measure of impudence deserved. But curiously, though she knew it was impudence, she was not indignant. There was something about the self-possessed little figure before her which challenged honesty. It was so good-humored, so admiring, so frankly bent on business. How could she oppose it with the heroics it might meet with smiling?

"Another thing," said Elsa. "You're forcing me, you know. You'll rush me into your husband's company. I shall have to see him as often as he'll let me, and I shall have to charm him all he'll let me. You don't believe I can; but I can. I've got the old bag of tricks, and though he sees they're tricks, he can't resist them. Some men can't. They'd rather have things made after a pattern than what you've got yourself — that kind of a heavenly mystic charm. They adore it, but it scares them, too."

Helen did not for an instant suspect her of throwing out a bait for confidence of any sort. She only felt profoundly lost because they seemed to be standing with an abyss between them, calling across it, the abyss of the sadness of the world.

"It's a pity," Elsa was saying.

"What's a pity?" Helen asked, out of her dream of the world's age of misery.

"It's a pity it isn't plain sailing, so you and I could know each other and you'd be nice to me. I like you a great deal better than I ever could him. He's charming,

when he wants to be, but he's no sense of humor. You found that out, too. And you're packed and crammed with humor, in spite of your shyness. So is your sister."

Helen must have looked a question, for Elsa continued:

"Yes, I've seen her. I've seen you both a lot. I sat beside you once in a car and heard all your talk. It wasn't about anything in particular. You felt cheerful and you had the sillies. I admired you tremendously that you could, after you'd left your Charles. I knew exactly the sort you were. Now I'm going. Do let me come again."

This last she said with an air of sudden bright impulsiveness irresistible in its charm. And Helen, to her own amazed incredulity, would have liked her to come again. Still she did not answer. She felt some hand, propriety's gloved hand it must have been, holding her back. And she fancied, with some impatience at herself, that if she were clever, if she had any initiative, any imagination, she would not have needed the cold hand to admonish her. She would have known some quick, warm act, to govern the situation and turn it to human use. Elsa was at the door now, and still smiling back at her.

"I'm not in the least the sort of person you think," she said. "I'm a fraud, of course, but it's only because I'm a business woman and business calls for fraud. I don't particularly enjoy it. What I'd like best would be to live in the country and keep bees. And I don't love your Charles — yet. He's got a nasty temper. But if you drive me to it I shall have to make him love me — in his way — and I can return it somehow." She had opened the door. She was outside. And she turned with another of those piquant smiles. "I'll show you the kind of fraud I am. I'm not married, and my name isn't Davenport and it isn't Elsa. It's really Henrietta. Good-by. I wish you'd let

me come again. That nice sister of yours would let me, just to be a sport. Well, no matter. It's no use, I suppose."

Now she was really gone. Helen heard the click of her smart shoes on the stairs, and she hesitated before shutting the door upon her. Why? she could not possibly understand. Was the woman so charming? And yet Helen was not easily charmed. And when she had shut the door she went quickly back into the sitting-room and looked out of the window in time to see Elsa walking down the street, a man beside her. And the man was Charles. So that was it, she thought, with an instant revulsion to bitterness and the welling sense of outrage. He had sent the woman, with the intent of spying and he had been waiting for her below. She went back to her work, wounded in the innermost heart of her. Like all wronged women she felt, not merely the simple passion of primal jealousy, the revulsion to outrage because she believed her own had been taken from her, but affronted pride in that her home had been invaded. She worked very hard, that day, at her folding. Her hands trembled and several times she stopped and wrung them together to get the blood into them and give the muscles an impatient wrench.

But Elsa had not expected to find Charles. Indeed her heart gave a little admonitory tap, and beat out its warning, "Now you've got to explain." And he didn't delay his demand for elucidation. There was no surprised interest at the sight of her. He was too concerned to see her coming out of Helen's door.

"What were you there for?" he asked, at once. "You don't know anybody there."

Elsa drew her veil down a little more smoothly over her chin, smiling up at him.

"No," she said. "I don't know anybody. I thought there might be an apartment to let."

"And was there?"

"No."

"If there had been, you couldn't have taken it."

"Why?" she asked pleasantly.

But he had no visible reason. It was hardly possible to say: "Because my wife lives there." He had still the greatest repugnance even to the mention of Helen's name to her. And she saw that, and smiled over it. After all, she thought, a man does keep the savagely protecting attitude toward his wife. It is because she is his property. What threatens her, threatens him.

"Besides," he said, taking another tack, "you don't want to move, do you?"

"It's a very lonesome house," she said. "There are too many offices. When everybody's gone at night I feel spooky."

"Well," said he, "anyway don't move down this way. And don't move anywhere in a hurry. We'll talk it over together and see what we can do."

Elsa noted the cosy plural and smiled a little behind her veil. With one stride he had bridged the practical abyss. And then it seemed, as they walked, the trumpets of the air called up one after another of the family who were not expected to see them together, who indeed must not see them. First, Charles was to be observed taking off his hat to his mother, in a few minutes saluting his father and again, incredibly, John. And when he had walked with Elsa to the newspaper office where he was to leave her, he was scowling in the unrestrained abandon of his younger days. Elsa looked up in his face and smiled. She grinned like a mischievous boy. Said she:



“It was funny, wasn’t it?”

“What was funny?” inquired Charles.

He had no idea she knew his people. He hadn’t any conception of the number of things she knew, of the painstaking instinct that prompted her to find them out lest she need them, or the accuracy with which she had stored them away. She was one who kept her facts mentally on file.

“Meeting them,” she said, “one after the other.” But before he could inquire where she’d seen them, she had set his mind spinning down another groove. “How do you think the *Voice* is going? Not sentimental enough, I’m afraid. Some of them have said so already. Pile it on a little more. Be abstract — love, mercy, meek inheriting the earth — that kind of thing. They won’t know what you mean — the old women of both sexes — but that’s no matter. They’ll like it all the better.”

But Elsa, that night, smiling again over the spectacle of the family, seriatim, saluting her and Charles together, also went back ruefully to the disastrous scene with Helen. It had failed, she was obliged to own, the audacious project she had hit upon in a moment of impatience at the slow moving of things. The interview was to lend her a field for action, wherein little directing pushes were to be given obscure events. Helen was to be convinced of her husband’s unbroken loyalty and at the same time wholesomely shocked into realizing that, although no siren had as yet acquired inalienable rights to him, he was in danger. It seemed to her the logic of the emotions that wifely virtue, though offended, must here rush in to save. Elsa was, as she had said, a business woman, and keen on the scent of what was likely to detract from Charles’s value to his owners. It was desirable from every point of view that his



domestic life should be unassailable. And here, in a way, she blamed herself. She ought never to have been seen with him at all; but when he was first selected by those higher powers there had been need of haste, and she hurried with the rest. He had been made to feel the rush and sweep of her cool ardor, alluring, standing off, beckoning yet denying when he came. And so specious was he known to be that they had never felt quite sure of him until he was doubly bound to her over and above the cause. He might break his bargain, if advantage called him to another quarter; but it would take a more heroic Samson than Charles Tracy to struggle from the woman's mesh.

Elsa had, besides, an uneasy suspicion that Helen might know something of his underground activities. Of that, through her implied accusation, she meant to assure herself. It hardly mattered, she thought, reading the fair page of Helen's look, what one said to her. She would keep the confidence of her enemy, as of her friend. And working as Elsa was with Charles, responsible for him as she had been made by the powers who had given him over into her hands, she simply had to know. So she had set her trap and Helen had not even nibbled. Innocence, it seemed, bore braver arms than guile.

## XII

WHO were they to whom the *Voice* was to be adapted? Simply the People, humanity in the rough, the People bearing votes in their multitudinous hands. They were to be confirmed in knowledge of their own strength and to be delicately instructed, by implication, in the effective using of it. They were to be reminded that not only was the vote theirs by unassailable right, but the option of quitting the responsible job of keeping the world alive or, if it seemed good to them in a moment of political revolt, of smashing the orderly structure built up, though imperfectly, by the past. This last form of power was a bludgeon of a weapon, an actual, almost a visible force. No skill or subtlety was required for the use of it, as the People were tacitly informed. It was simply something very big and hard, and they were expected, if not to crack heads with it, when the looked-for moment came, to obstruct. It was scarcely possible to estimate the potencies that were theirs. When the ship of state got going grandly, the wind of their breath of power could blow icebergs down from the frozen regions of the mind, and the icebergs would grind up against the good ship and beat her off her course. The People were not to be incited to strangle the activities of public life by direct and raucous speech. They were played upon by the forces that are mighty to pull down, to the end that they might learn how, in their turn, to smash and shatter, and they were to be taught a language, the language of love which

meant, at this time, "Love thyself." And the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," meant also, at this period of the world, "Thou shalt not kill Germans."

When Charles had left Elsa, he went on and up the steps to the editorial rooms of the *Voice*. He had a delightful little den, not more than twelve feet square, with an old-fashioned desk and two chairs, and on the wall a portrait of Abraham Lincoln and members of his cabinet. This hadn't been the office when the old régime was in residence. That was a grimy room with every implement of up-to-date journalism flung about it in the orderly confusion a professional man loves, and, the only sign of an avenue of escape from what the wires were bringing in, a set of O. Henry over the desk. The former editor never had time to read his O. Henry. He kept another set at home, and this he did doze over when he got to bed, at all hours. But by day, when the wires throbbed too hard and his ears beat with weariness and his nerves screamed out to be let alone and not played upon any more by the devil's tattoo of things happened, he would look up at the O. Henrys, and their covers soothed him, and he would go back to work. But now that the *Voice* was by no means what it had been, save that it swore it was keeping to the old policy, and even the editorial cubby-holes of offices were shifted, this one, presided over by O. Henry, became the outer vestibule to Charles's own. Here contributors waited until he summoned them, or they were told he couldn't, after all, see them to-day. A girl under a preposterous yellow cowlick, if that might be considered the name for it, sat at a desk, a telephone before her, and she spoke into the next room with a solicitous air which made the other end of the wire seem a thousand miles away. But Charles, on the other side of the partition, answered

in his own person what she put as an anxious appeal to an unseen mediary.

"Is Mr. Tracy there? Oh! Could you hunt him up? Look in the composing room. Mr. Brennan is here."

This was what she said one morning, and when Charles replied immediately that Brennan was to come in, she turned to him with her professional smile and said Mr. Tracy had that minute got back. Through that door, yes. And Brennan opened it, frowning a little because he didn't half know whether he liked his job, and went in, his cartoons in his hand. It was an exceedingly urbane and welcoming Charles he found, aggressively smooth and fitted with irreproachable clothes. If Charles had been in a lower stratum of life he would have worn cravats a thought too pronounced and, it may be, used scented soap. As it was, he gave an impression of sartorial care that overbore any sense you might feel of his having a mind or a possible soul, and Brennan regarded him with a dull distaste that sprang from his own low physical state. Brennan's cough was troubling him a little more than for a week and he saw in himself other symptoms of imminent banishment. He felt jaded, fagged, at odds with life that took so much out of you and put nothing in. He was irritable, too, and had been telling himself, while he walked along on his way to the *Voice*, that he hated the whole damned show and he'd take himself out of it if it wasn't for the war. Even a cripple had got to stand by till that was over, if it was thirty years, if only to knife incompetence and trickery. And had he and the other fellows really played John a shabby trick? He wasn't sure. Charles's perfection of attire seemed to him wearisome, if not disgusting; but when Charles had shaken hands with him, a hearty clasp, and pointed to the chair

at the end of the desk, Brennan, seated, his package on his knees, thought the fellow probably meant well, after all.

"Now!" said Charles, as if they had each accomplished a long journey, traveling to each other, and were happily met at last, "what have you got there? Are they for me?"

"Why, yes," said Brennan sulkily, out of the last shades of his irritation. "I suppose they're for you. You've bought me, haven't you?"

Charles laughed a little, indulgently, but didn't deny he had. And he took the three cartoons and began to study them, pursing his lips and whistling noiselessly. Brennan waited, not looking at him. The cartoons would be rejected, he knew. Some unformulated distrust of Charles, some echo of John's outspoken anger and despair that he had sold himself, were working in him and he was taken aback when Charles laid the cardboard down on the desk before him and said, with the utmost warmth:

"Brennan, they're great!"

Brennan did look at him then, and met his direct glance, his whole air breathing such wholesale commendation that it seemed like a warm wind enveloping him and changing his arid judgments of the man into something almost tremulously grateful and apologetic

"They'll do, will they?" he managed.

"Do! My dear boy, they're ripping."

"I s'pose they ought to be used at once," said Brennan. "The only point of a cartoon is to have it in the nick of time."

That Charles apparently didn't hear. He was examining the topmost drawing again, with a thoughtful yet smiling admiration. It was the Kangaroo and the Lion

and the Cock, drilling — amazing spirit Brennan had put into his creatures — and the American Eagle, tail feathers drooping, picked up corn outside the fence. And that was the word Charles used.

“Amazing!” he said, “perfectly amazing the meaning you put into a line.”

Brennan got up, and his cough hacked at him. Charles, too, rose and laid the cartoons on the desk.

“Brennan,” said he, and paused. It sounded as if there were something he impulsively wanted to say, and, for some reason, couldn’t allow himself the rash indulgence. Brennan thought he probably wanted the cartoons altered. He was used enough to that. An editor often had some fool idea of his own he expected to graft on a finished piece of work. And Charles was looking at him apologetically and beginning, when the cough ceased: “What I’d like, you know — why don’t you go into the country for a month and get rid of that beastly cold?”

Brennan, for an instant, stood and stared at him. Nobody talked to him about his cough, nobody but the doctor who had to sail into him at intervals because Brennan treated his disease as you might oppose a hated enemy. He ignored it, he yielded to it when he had to or go under; but who knew what it was to him at night or in the flat middle of the days when he couldn’t work and found his tools receding from him to a dim distance, though they lay before him on the table? The doctor dared everything and swore at him roundly, because he had a right to; but none of Brennan’s friends seemed even to hear his cough. Now Charles was looking at him in so warm a fellowship, so impulsive an understanding of what the enemy must be, that Brennan suddenly felt his knees weak under him. Was he, he thought, going to cry?



"Go away," said Charles. "Take a lot of time — and a lot of money. I'll advance it. Anything you say. Your cartoons are good for it. And don't come back till you're on your pins again. Send me your stuff. Or don't send it. You'll be worth twice what you are to-day if you break off short and then pitch into it again."

"No," said Brennan slowly, "I sha'n't go away. I don't need to — not yet. And I don't want any money."

But he went off down the stairs feeling warmed, strengthened, alert with a brave excitement. Charles could always make you feel twice the man you were, if he took the trouble. Now, at his desk, he looked attentively yet absently at the cartoons. They were all to the point that America was out of the war to her own undoing, and that she should be in it. They preached haste, haste. Presently he leaned back in his chair, leaving them on the desk, and thought, but not of cartoons or the greedy maw of his paper. He thought of Helen. He seemed to have gone a long way from her since they had had their last words together, and chiefly because he was doing the things she would not countenance. For the last years, while he had been so tremendously in love with her, he had felt her gentle, mute commands. There were things Helen, in his way of putting it to himself, wouldn't stand for, and for a long period of time, he didn't do them. This was while she imaged the unattainable beauty which is a madness to the lover who sees how ineffable it is and yet does not possess it in its inner perfection, never has possessed it, and knows within himself he never can. Charles didn't really care about the inner perfections of Helen: only he was convinced they were there and he wanted them. The way she talked to his father and grandfather! he had caught her at it. Foolish things they rambled on about, and



laughed consumedly at what was of no consequence at all, chiefly what didn't exist. With him his wife was sweetly shy and silent, often adorably expansive — for Charles was a wonderful lover — but yet with none of that foolish banter he so despised and coveted. Was she afraid of him? Sometimes he liked to think she was. It gave him an uplifting sense of power, and he loved to reassure her. But when he did that, Helen smiled and he felt uneasy. What the devil did women mean anyway by putting on an air of mystery, of perversity, just to add to their own charm? And then he would think back over the days of their life together, the sweet security of it, and relent toward her: for no woman was ever a more perfect companion in the beaten ways. She demanded nothing, she gave generously. The trouble was, he thought this morning, as he settled back in his chair, frowning over the perverse coil of things, she probably had no sense of humor. She laughed with the rest of the family over childish things because that was the only kind that pleased her and they, being fond of her, helped it along. But as to her connection with him, one of the biggest grudges he had against her now was that she had been solemn of late — indulgent, insultingly so — but solemn.

And then the telephone rang and the voice from the next room told him Mr. Bailey was there. He recalled himself from the uneven ground of woman's perversity, shuffled the cartoons together and thrust them into a lower drawer. Any one seeing them go in there, with an unregarding haste and roughness, would have known they were not soon to come out again. Bailey opened the door and put in a small, shy foot. There he hung a moment, blushing, if his pink cheeks could be pinker. The boys used to say enviously and profanely to Bailey that this feigned shy-

ness was an asset. He was as coy as a girl. He looked as if butter wouldn't melt. But that was only until he'd got out of his protagonist everything he wanted of him. Then butter did melt and he swore picturesquely, kicked up his heels and was off; or he stayed and made you acquainted with the real Bailey. To this banter Bailey never returned more than the assurance: "But I really am shy." Perhaps Charles had studied him, perhaps he knew him by intuition. At any rate, he received him as one man of the world talking to another. Bailey took a chair and tucked his feet under it in his stereotyped manner. No, he wouldn't smoke. Didn't smoke. Didn't believe in it, in fact. Sound mind in a sound body, he suggested. Charles only laughed and left the tobacco near him. He'd seen Bailey enveloped in a cloud, puffing famously. What his game was now he didn't know, but Charles had a game of his own.

"Brought me some stuff?" he asked.

Bailey was regarding him with eyes of clearest candor.

"I didn't know what you wanted," he said. "I dropped in for a tip."

"Why, your verse, of course. That's our contract."

"On the same lines?"

"Precisely."

"Same as I've been doing?"

"Yes. It's corking."

Bailey almost imperceptibly smacked his lips. He had his own unassailable opinion of his work. He didn't well see how it could be better. But he wanted some things more clearly understood. He had been virtually hypnotised that day when he and Charles made their bargain, and he had begun to wonder whether Charles always had

that effect when he wanted anything very much. You ran toward him as eagerly as you sometimes afterward wanted to run away.

"But you know," said he, determined now to get everything clear, "you know how I've been pitching into things: thrones, principalities, powers, rotten parties. Sure you want me to keep on, same old way? I want to, mind you. I'd rather do it than eat. In fact, I do it better than I do anything else."

Charles was looking at him indulgently, and as if he found him exceedingly interesting to meet, as if it were impossible not to agree with him, and again Bailey had that eager sensation of wanting to go forward, almost anywhere, if Charles led. But he thought it was only his own dream he wanted to pursue.

"Do it," said Charles, "pitch in all you want to. Give it to 'em, hot. I sha'n't trip you up. Though I would suggest — now, I don't know how you'll take this — a little, a very little caution."

Bailey's pink face turned sulky.

"Don't like it," he said. "Head over heels, slap-dash, that's the only way I can fight. Snatch up a ploughshare or a pruning hook, if you can't find your pen. And my stuff is fighting, you understand. It's the only sort I can do. Literature can go — well, literature can go to hell till this war is over. Till then I don't mean to write a word that isn't meant to persuade some man — some tens and hundreds of men — to think right and vote right and fight right."

Somehow Bailey didn't look rosy and fair-skinned when he said that. You forgot his long lashes, and the way he had drawn up his foot under the chair. He looked very stiff and hard, the soldier look, stiff from training and

hard because he knows what medicine is the only remedy for certain ills.

"You mustn't ask me to write anything that isn't propaganda," he went on, "for I won't do it. That's flat. I won't write at all."

"Oh," said Charles, at once, and with, it seemed, only a concerned benevolence, "you must write and you must write for me. Our contract holds us horribly tight, you see. Because if you don't write for me, you can't for anybody. And you must write. You're too valuable to lose."

"Say," said Bailey, growing pink again, and grinning at the clever thought he'd had, "I believe I ought to have bound you tighter in that contract. Why, you're only tied to the extent of paying me for my exclusive output. Now I swear I believe you ought to have been tied up to print a certain number of my things a week. You've bought 'em, but how do I know you'll print 'em?"

He laughed, like the shrewd chap he had begun to feel himself, and Charles laughed, too, louder and longer than he did. There was a duet of laughter, quite like a stage gust of two who know a joke and egg each other on. Charles stopped first, and came down to an indulgent staccato.

"Well," he said, "there's one proof I shall print you. I tried hard enough to get your stuff, now didn't I?"

So that Bailey was absurdly satisfied, and got up to go.

"Then," said he, "I'm to stir up a little brimstone in a pail and set her afire."

"You're miles behind," said Charles. "Brimstone? Your stuff's like some of the latest scientific fizz-bangs the boches are using. They'd like to get hold of you and set you going. But after all — see here, Bailey, I be-

lieve you could get a bigger pull if you went a little mild at first. Now you want to drive America into the war. Why can't you do some idyllic stuff about America at peace? That first, you know. Then show it's a false peace, a lying security. See? And go at it again, hammer and tongs, — war! war!"

Bailey stood looking at him from under frowning brows. The pink again had faded from his face. He looked like youth grown old in wisdom. Yet not suspicion: he had no doubts of Charles. He spoke seriously, as if he admonished Charles, recalled him.

"No, Mr. Tracy," he said. "That's compounding with villainy. I can't do that. I can't waste a word on idyllic pictures. I'm not prophesying — or if I am, it's not any holy city I see. I'd rather be a baby Isaiah, foretelling the ruin to come, and calling on us, if we don't repent — no, calling on the rocks to hide us."

He meant it tremendously, more amazingly so than Charles had ever seen anybody mean anything except Helen when she owned her love for him. And perhaps it was really amazing because it was this physically ineffective creature who spoke, who couldn't defend his country with the strength of his hands but was giving her everything he had — the power of his brain and his will and the pangs of his sick heart. For an instant Charles, who liked to answer every man according to his own type of desire, felt about for something stately — old Testament stuff, he thought, to throw back, but all he could manage was:

"Of course, do as you like, do it your own way. That'll suit me."

"It'll have to suit you," said Bailey, and as he went out he knew his hand on the door-knob trembled and he hated himself, knowing Charles would see it, too.

### XIII

CHARLES made a long day at the office, getting his hand on the machinery, shutting off power here and dropping a little oil in there. He gave some time to initiating a new man, because one of the old staff had been discharged, for a sophistical reason. The others were going to be discharged as sophistical reasons accumulated. Only this they did not yet suspect. Charles had come in with such a breeze of banners blowing, such a warm and even too ingenuous appreciation of everybody, as it seemed, that the first apprehension of changed conditions was effectually lulled. He looked, indeed, incredibly too "easy." But everybody buttressed up the daily task with an added diligence, momentary, perhaps, but natural under the first breathings of relief, and was strengthened anew with the certainty that the policy of the paper was to remain unchanged. And who could support an unchanged policy so unerringly as the old staff? Charles had been trying for a week to get hold of Finch, whom also he had bought for his exclusive output, and Finch wasn't to be found. There were traditions that he lived in a shanty out of town and raised ducks and that even the R. F. D. dropped his mail down a woodchuck's hole. But at the end of the day came in two of Finch's brief, biting editorials, the work Charles had bought him for. Charles read them, swore at them, tore them in two and dropped them in the basket. He had not acquired Finch to write editorials assailing sloth in high places. He had meant to get a mollifying influence on him before he put pen to paper. Finch's



mission was to exalt the arts of peace, to deplore a shadow of militarism, for whatever cause, creeping over America's bright dream. This was, it is to be remembered, the early winter of 1916. No need, except for the historian, of recalling those days now, except as we ponder their admonition and as they affected the lives of men. Everybody was being moulded by them, in one way or another, whether they knew it or not. But of the big events America came up against, like the late presidential election and the attitude of Washington toward the world, it is not necessary to speak here. The men and women of this story were breathing with the time, like other men and women, hurt by it, briefly encouraged and then bruised again. For they were a part of the world, and the world was at war.

Charles, that day, went home dog-tired. He was fractious to the breaking point, and there was no one to turn to for understanding or soft words. Mrs. Davenport was in New York, to meet the chief of her department of propaganda. Charles could not bring himself to go round to see the family. He felt their guarded antagonism, had felt it at once, as soon as he told them his wife had left him. They were, he knew, standing by Helen. When he got home to his irreproachable house there was another provocative to irritation in Cross, the perfect indoor man, who had served him for a couple of years and never more like a beneficent shadow than since Helen had gone; but Cross was, he furiously felt, inside that unpenetrated silence where the souls of butlers hold integrity, also standing by Helen. He ate his dinner with the evening paper before him, and got furious with it because it crumpled up and played tricks with his wine-glass and plate. Finally the whole offensiveness of the



world seemed to pass into the paper, and he swore at it and threw it on the floor. And when Cross picked it up, and restored it to a paper's normal placidity and proffered it again, with an unsympathetic neutrality, he swore at him, too, and had some ado to keep from striking the paper from his hand.

But he finished his dinner without interest and then went off to the library, leaving the paper behind him. He sat down by the fire, stretched his legs out and began to smoke with a luxurious assumption that he was making himself extraordinarily comfortable. Yet, as he smoked, he saw that the very perfection of the house and its service, instead of making Helen's absence more tolerable, had embittered it tenfold. If he had found the dust and ashes that were on his head, over his dignity, his reputation among men, also over the entire surface of the tangible desert she had left behind her, he thought he need not have been so furious with her. He had once gone with his mother to the house of a farmer near Grasslands, where the wife had died and the farmer was trying to get along alone. He never forgot the forlorn aspect of the place: the plants unwatered and drooping, the last meal left in disarray on the table, ashes on the hearth and dust dulling everything. Charles wasn't sympathetic over the tawdry scene. He only thought how like the Dickens old Phinney's place looked, and now, as he sat in the dustless luxuriance of his own silent room, the picture of it recurred to him and he decided old Phinney's case was better than his own. For at least he could damn the dust, and Charles had only Helen to damn. His anger kept rising in him, tide upon tide, until at last it seemed to him it had to have an outlet or it would return upon him and submerge his heart. He got up and went to the telephone and called Helen's

number. He had no plan. He was going to call her up, that was all. While he waited, his brain suddenly grew composed, alert in its working, and his anger seemed to go. What should he say, he wondered, if it were Jessie who came? Well, he could simply hang up the receiver and give it up, give up what he meant to do, though even at this last instant he hardly knew what that was. His mind might know, that little cocksure person sitting within. He didn't. But it was Helen who answered. Her perfect voice with the little lift in it came with such a shock of nearness that he felt as if she had touched his hand. Then he spoke and his voice was not his own. It was his father's. The little cocksure person within was managing that.

"That you, Helen of the Topless Towers?" He had heard his father banter her with that when they whipped up their old foolish gaieties together. She laughed, and he knew she was taken in. But the laugh, the unchanged laugh, seemed to him the cruellest thing he had ever heard. She was laughing, and she had abandoned him to the horrible desert of his dustless and irreproachable solitude.

"Yes, dear," said she. "How are the other dears?"

"Put on your hat and run over," said he. "Father wants to see you."

"Yes, in just a minute, when Jessie comes back. John's taken her for a spin round the Common. They're going to run. I told them they'd be arrested."

"You come along," said Charles. "We don't want Jessie. It's a joke. Leave her a note and come."

"All right," said Helen.

He hung up the receiver and went back to his chair and sat there, leaning forward, his hands between his knees. He felt sick, and the sweat stood on his forehead. But

while he sat there Helen, he knew, would be putting on her hat, and he got up and went into the hall as softly as he could, not to notify Cross who, with his everlasting officiousness, was always on the alert, took his hat and coat and hurried out. He walked very fast up the hill to Helen's number and past it, and when he had come to the corner above, halted to watch. For several minutes he stayed there, and the blood in him began to cool and his courage to ebb downward. He had stayed too long in his chair, hating her. She had escaped him and gone. And just as he was thinking some of them would come home with her and he might as well give up all hope for that night, she came out, turned to give a look up and down the street, and then went on, with her individual beauty of haste. He was cool again now and started on behind her, with long strides and as noiselessly as he could. Once he felt she was going to stop — it was only the extreme apprehension of his nerves — and he turned back and walked the other way. But in a minute he looked and found she was going on, and now she was nearly at the corner. If she turned that he must lose her, for he could never halt her in the brighter light. When he came up beside her he walked with her a step or two without speaking and she looked up at him. There was the least perceptible break in her pace, but she was keeping on and he knew he had to be very quick in his force or his persuasion.

“Helen!” he said.

She made no answer.

“Helen, you're coming home with me.”

The little cocksure person up in his brain had tossed him that. It was a phrase he and Helen both remembered, from the old time when they had been so passionately

wrapped in each other that once, midway in a journey when she was to leave him, to visit her own people, he had said to her, at the last minute: "Helen, you're coming home with me." And she had yielded, in delight at yielding and the manner of it, his loving roughness, her glory in submission, and they had said the phrase many a time to each other after, to emphasize by a word the misery of parting. What did it mean to her now? He waited an instant, and then, as she didn't speak, didn't move her face toward him, and, as they came to the corner, turned to go her way, he knew. She had not forgotten the old password. She was repudiating it. And if she didn't heed that, there was no persuasion for it, only violence. He put his arm about her and swept her from her course. The whole slight strength of her was against him. They were not struggling, but he was half carrying, half dragging her, and at last he felt mastery and its wild delight. Nobody was in the street, and he was sure now of what he was to do. More and more she resisted him, and now so heavily that he wondered if she could be fainting; but he put his other hand under her chin and turned her face up to him. She had closed her eyes. For an instant he had a mad impulse to kiss the white, immobile face, to kiss it brutally, reminding her he had the right. But after all, he didn't want to kiss her. He was, he realised at the instant, insanely angry with her, and, fainting or not, she had to go with him.

Helen was not fainting. She was strung up to the tension that meets tremendous onslaughts on the will. And this place where she found herself — this danger, she believed it — was something she had foreseen and terribly imagined. For the moment had to come, she had told herself, when she would meet Charles and find him angry with

her. And the insanity of his anger she knew, though its fury had always passed her by. Helen, like other women through the war, had been learning a new commandment: "Thou shalt not be afraid." She had been looking over to Europe and marveling at what other women, assaulted by the hideous grotesquerie of evil, were enduring, at the dogged patience of their meeting that grim destiny, and she had determined that nothing should ever make her flinch. Nothing, if she were attacked, should lead her to take refuge amid the complaining chorus of physical frailty. In her measure she would stand up to things as the world was standing. She would fight her weight. But she was, at this instant, powerless in his hands, horribly afraid, and she was thinking as tumultuously as Charles. Fears came to her so fast that it seemed as if they pelted like hail. At one of the turnings he paused slightly, and she wondered whether he would take her down to the embankment where he could talk to her in a greater solitude, or whether he would hurry her over the railing and leave her there to drown. She could swim, but she also thought, with a grim sort of detachment, how heavy her coat was, how impossible it would be to get it off in the water and then, like one in delirium, dwelling on suggested trivialities, she remembered how many hooks there were on the dress she wore, and thought how hostile all confining things are when you come to be killed.

He was carrying her on, and when they had passed two more corners she knew she was not to drown. She was, exactly in the words of the remembered phrase, going home with him. There was relief in that, and yet she was not sure there might not be something else at the end of the quick journey to make her the more afraid. He took her up the steps, and she was not resisting now with every inch

of her. Something in her resolution had dulled. She was saving herself for the next step, the unknown. When he put his key in the door she did break away and run, and got half a dozen paces before he caught her. But he was there instantly and she shrank, thinking he would strike her down and carry her in helpless, because it was less trouble.

Charles had no idea of striking her. He was triumphantly sure of her now, and he threw his arm again about her and swept her on and up the steps, in a swift rush because now nothing remained but to get it over, and he opened the door and freed her, standing beside her in the hall and smiling. And facing her, cap in hand, was Cross, who knew Charles went out and was about to follow on some errand of his own, but, hearing the door close, had hurried in from the back regions to see who came. He had been devoted to Helen and he stood stark at the sight of her. His thin face suffused and he looked, Charles in his triumph thought, as if he might break down and sob. Charles wondered why Cross hadn't sobbed a little over him. It was Cross who broke the bounds of decorum and spoke, but only the one word:

"Madam!"

Helen, instantly recalled to the sanities of life by the mere sight of him, made a little gesture toward the door, and Cross understood. He opened the door, she stepped out and he followed her, and Charles called after him, an angry, hoarse bark, like a dog.

"Yes, sir," said Cross respectfully. But he closed the door.

Helen was walking fast and he went on behind her. She had given him only that one glance and he could not be sure she would speak to him again. Did she even



know he was there? Helen had indeed forgotten him, forgotten Charles and the present moment. Memories were overwhelming her. She had stood there in the hall an instant only before Cross opened the door for her, but it had been long enough for one look at the wide staircase, the old clock at the turn of the landing, and in the library at the left her own portrait smiling at her from the wall. Another slightest token of her strangeness in the dear lost spot was the pile of visiting cards. These were the last ripples of social favor likely to rise for her again. They, too, if she did not soon take her accredited place in that little world, would cease. To-night she was like a poor ghost revisiting the scenes of mortal rites and obligations. How soon would it be before she was indeed forgotten?

Now her steps drooped and her breath came feebly. She stopped, aware, as she must have been all along, of Cross. He came up beside her and Helen, not speaking, put her hand through his arm, and Cross was proud. They went on together, and at the corner before her own block she stopped.

"Thank you," she said. "Now you may go back."

"Madam!" said Cross, from his anxious heart.

"No," said Helen. "It's only a step. And thank you."

At her own door, she looked. Cross was still there. He was, in the old country phrase, seeing her home. When the door closed behind her, he went back and found what he expected: Charles, in the library, waiting to call him in and get his notice. Charles was not in the towering rage Cross had pictured that minute before the encounter. He was coldly contemptuous and framed the man's dismissal decorously, and Cross received it with the "Very good, sir," of an unvarying professional respect. Then



he went up to put his things together — for he was to go at once — and left Charles standing there before Helen's picture, looking up, in what seemed an unmoved interest, at its wraith-like innocence. But Charles really had a choking in his throat and a burning of the eyelids. He could not have told what he was feeling, whether he loved her or whether he hated her. He had an unwilling admiration for her because she had taken him by surprise and had defeated him. And then the inner welling of his emotion went down, and he swore aloud, in a normal anger, and at the same moment Cross, flinging his belongings together in what had been his orderly room, but was now a wild chaos of trouser-legs and shirt-sleeves, also swore. Each was the natural man in his revolt against conditions, and very much alike they were, in spite of the No Man's Land between them.

Helen went upstairs with her usual light steadiness and into her own room where she put her things away. Jessie was calling her from the sitting-room and she went in, able, she had no doubt, to account for herself easily. Jessie was on the sofa, her hair disordered from the vehemence of her butting about for hollows in the pillow, a book face down beside her. She was a picture of sweetest youth in disarray. Helen, who was orderly in the measure Jessie was not, went forward, and picked up the book, smoothed it as if to make up for ill-treatment, and put it on the table. Then she sat down in her low chair and began to tremble, and this went on until her teeth chattered and she was a piteous sight. Jessie sprang up and went to her. First she hugged her, in her impetuous puppy way, and then she ran into the dining-room and threw open the sideboard for a cordial of some sort, and on to Helen's room and came back with lavender salts.

"Not a drop of liquor in this house," she said. "To-morrow morning you'll order some or I'll see. O darlin' dear, what is it?"

Helen smiled at her ineffectually and bit her lips and tried all the shifts the poor body has at call when it is shamefully shaken, and by and by the trembling stopped and she drew a long breath again. But she was still cold, and Jessie brought a fur coat and wrapped her in it, and sat at her feet and looked up at her.

"What is it, darlin' dear?" she said again. "Tell Jessie."

But Helen shook her head.

"You wrote you were going over to the house," said Jessie. "Didn't you go?"

Again Helen shook her head.

"Why not? Did anybody bother you? Did you get frightened?"

"Yes," said Helen. "I got frightened."

"You sha'n't go out alone," said Jessie. "But oughtn't I to telephone them and tell why you didn't come?"

"No," said Helen, and later, when Jessie proposed it again, she got fractious over it and asked to be let alone, and then was sorry. But that night, after they had both tried hard to sleep, Jessie got up and went in to her and knelt by the bed and laid her cheek to Helen's hand, put out to welcome her.

"What was it, dear?" she asked her. "You trouble me when you don't tell."

"I got frightened, that was all," said Helen. "Run back, dear. You'll be cold." But as Jessie was going, she called after her, "To-morrow we'll have a chain put on the door."

## XIV

ON the following night, John sat with grandsir before the fire up in grandsir's room. A little dinner was going on downstairs, some of Norris's old friends of pen and ink, and John, who was never sanguine of being amused by oldsters who talked down to him, dined out, coming up later to steal a half-hour's solitude with grandsir whom he found rather better than usual, and, as it always happened when his enemy intermitted hostilities, ready for life and the call of things. Grandsir had just walked across the floor — happy excursion to one who was customarily petrified in a chair — and had returned to the fire, and there John found him and also stretched his legs to the blaze. When John had grandsir to himself at moments of care-free intercourse like this, he was, he admitted frankly, made. Besides, he had something to tell.

"Grandsir," said he, feeling very shy.

"What is it, old boy?" asked grandsir, stretching one foot further in a luxurious testing.

"I'm going," said John, "to make you a munificent offer. I told Allan I should."

"My Allan Lloyd?"

"Yes. He can't tell you. Says you'll think he wants to do it. And he doesn't want to. He's got to, that's all."

"He's going to leave me," said grandsir quietly, draw-

ing his foot up to the point where it was likelier to be safe. He couldn't risk another pang just then.

"He's learning to drive," said John, speaking fast to get the emotional part of it over. For he was afraid he should have to persuade and show grandsir how tremendously he wanted something of his own, something that might not seem to be as selfish as it really was.

"You see Allan wants to get into the ambulance corps and over to France as soon as they'll let him. And, grandsir! Now wait — don't speak — think it over — I want to apply for the place. I'm crazy to have you take me on."

Grandsir could not speak at once, and the two didn't look at each other. But when he did speak John heard the difference in his voice — it had warmed up, John thought — and he saw grandsir had liked it.

"Peel off my clothes and chuck me into my bath and put me on my tummy in your lap, like a decrepit old baby, to be dried off?" said grandsir. "And then get me into my crib and give me my bottle in the middle of the night and say 'There! there!' when I have a legs-ache? You don't know, old man, what you'd have to go through."

"Oh, but I'd love it," said John. He was speaking out because grandsir was meeting him so charmingly, wasn't batting him over the head and telling him he'd be no good anyway. "I'd just adore it. I don't know anything I'd like better. And I'd be as mum as a fish when your legs ached. I'd laugh, though. You're awful funny, grandsir, when they ache and you swear at 'em. I don't believe anybody's ever told you that, but you are — funny as frogs."

"No," said grandsir mildly, "I don't believe I actually knew how funny I am on such occasions. Well, we'll

see what we'll do. Anyhow we'll send Allan off all right on his adventure. But I guess we can find another nurse for the old baby that isn't so valuable as you are. You know, John, you've got more or less of a brain."

"Oh, what's that matter? What's the odds, so long as you can't do a thing with your legs and arms and eyes when that's what they want now. You know, a while ago I got it into my head I could learn to fly."

"You can't," said grandsir, in a finality that did not seem to be a question, but an answer of itself.

"No, I was turned down. Evidently there's something about me that prevents my standing on my head or even running an ambulance. I call it rotten luck."

"You'll be stronger as you grow older," said grandsir. "I've always felt that."

"Thunder! but I want to be stronger now," said John. "It's now they want us. There's Charles — he's tough as a horse. But would he go over to France? Not if you blew him out of a gun. No, sir. He'll stay right here and make money."

"Charles goes the pace, though. If he doesn't look sharp he'll break down. Charles drinks."

"Oh, I don't believe he kicks over the traces, once in an age. He takes his glass now and then, but that's only to buck him up for the scariest of his deals."

"Nevertheless," said grandsir, "he's going a pretty pace. He lives a kind of melodrama, you see, a sort of detective play—it takes it out of you like the deuce. He's keyed up all the time. We're a nervous lot, we Tracys. If it hadn't been for apple trees, I should have come out worse than I have."

"Now I wonder," said John admiringly, "just how you know so much about what's going on. You sit up

here and make charts of orchards, and you find out more than all the rest of us put together. I bet there's one thing you don't know."

"No takers," said grandsir. "I bet there's ten. What is it?"

"I bet you don't know what Charles has done to the *Voice*."

"What has he?"

"You know its old policy was to be continued. And you remember what a decent paper it was. Well, Charles has turned it into an old maid's tea-party."

"He'll knock his circulation galley-west."

"Oh, no, he won't. The pacifists are all taking it, and the pro-Germans are licking it up like cream. Don't you see how he's cracking up a tranquil America and pitching into the civilisations of the world, and preaching the gospel of persuasion? And how he's taking the heart right out of us.—"

"Not you, John," said grandsir. "He hasn't taken the heart out of you."

"No, by jinks! But he'd like to mighty well, only he knows I'm on to him. But don't you see what he's doing? He's holding us back. He's preaching delay, and he's doing it with such horrid cleverness you can't put your finger on him."

"Well," said grandsir, "you think—" he hesitated for John to fill in the pause.

"He's pro-German. That's what I think."

"Oh, I can't believe that. He's no reason to scavenge for Germany."

"She's bought him, that's all. Charles has just as surely been bought as any of their spies."

"What about your Brennan? What about Bailey?"

Their work's red-hot, as bad as yours. Charles wouldn't have bought them for the paper if he meant to tone it down."

"How many cartoons of Brennan's has he published? How much of Finch's stuff or Bailey's? Well, how much? Not a line. They must have been handing in stuff right along. That was the bargain. Charles has simply chucked it."

"Why don't you ask them about it—ask 'em what he says?"

"Ask 'em?" said John. "I wouldn't be found dead with 'em. They knew perfectly well what Charles is and they let him go and buy 'em in the open market. Or anyway, if they didn't know, they were bally fools and that's just as bad. It's criminal."

"Oh, they mightn't have found anything against him. You know yourself what a charmer Charles is when he wants anything."

"Now, grandsir, don't you go to whitewashing Charles, same as father does, just to keep the family together. Say, grandsir, ain't the family a funny bunch? As a firm, I mean, a working proposition. When one of 'em queers the pitch and still keeps up a big bluff to make things go, you've got to pretend you're taken in by it. Rotten, I call it."

"Families are peculiar," said grandsir. "I've often thought that. But I dare say the thing couldn't go on any other way."

"There's Charles now; Charles is an outlaw. He's no more like the rest of us than if a German stork had brought him over and dropped him down the chimney. And we all know it, but not one of us'll tell the truth about him. Except me. I will. Even Helen won't. She leaves him, but she'd be sand-bagged before she'd tell



us what she left him for. Hold on! Somebody's coming. It's a swish. I bet it's Helen herself."

He got up and went to the door, and grandsir, too, got up, proudly conscious of being found standing on his feet and also smiling at himself for the childishness of it. But it was not Helen. It was Jessie, serious, her brows knitted, and coming in hesitatingly as if not quite sure whether she ought to be there at all. Indeed, she was so different from her usual gay self that John asked at once what was the matter and grandsir listened with an intent concern. Something, they thought at once, had happened to Helen.

"I suppose I oughtn't to have come in this way," she said. She took the chair grandsir indicated and threw back her fur with a definitive air that seemed to say she was here to talk something over and must stay until it was done. "I mean, I stole Helen's key. I didn't ring. Was Helen here last night?"

"Not up here," said grandsir, taking his chair again and glad to get it. "I didn't hear she came at all."

"Why, no," said John, "mother'd have said so."

Then Jessie told the story of Helen's coming home: first of her own coming and finding Helen's note, saying she was going over to the house because Mr. Tracy had telephoned and asking Jessie not to come. And then of her terror and the state she had been in all day, apprehensive, quiet, watching from the window.

"I've come out now to mail a letter," said Jessie. "That's what I told her. But I went into the kitchen and asked Hannah to be sure she doesn't see anybody while I'm gone. Mr. Tracy, what frightened her last night? What could have frightened her, and what's kept her frightened all day?"

"Ask her," said grandsir.

"Ask her! I should think I did ask her. But ask Helen! All she says is to tell me not to remind her of it. And I said, 'But Helen, you were frightened.' And then she said, 'Yes, I was frightened.' And she looked frightened again."

"That proves it," said John.

He was standing beside her, his hands in his pockets, and from time to time he took quick little walks to the window, as if he couldn't be controlled.

"Proves what?" asked Jessie.

"Proves what did it. It was Charles. Helen isn't obstinate ordinarily. It's only about Charles. Now, since she's left him, she's dumb as a fish."

Jessie turned to grandsir, flushed all over her young face.

"I wish you'd find out, Mr. Tracy," she said. "You can do it, perhaps — nobody else. How am I going to take care of her if I don't know what I've got to save her from? And if she's frightened — it isn't like Helen, you see. It's awful." She got up and put on her fur again, quickly, as if all she could do was done and there was no time for deliberation. "I must go."

"I'll go with you," said John. "My hat's in the hall."

He ran down and grandsir put out his hand to Jessie, and, when she gave him hers, held it for a minute and patted it with the other delicate palm.

"Sorry," he said. "Sorry, my dear."

She nodded at him and smiled, but he saw even gay Jessie was shaken enough to cry a little if she hadn't thought it silly. And then she, too, went and found John downstairs waiting for her. They slipped out quietly,

hearing the voice of the diners in an animated disorder, and John said:

"I left you with grandsir on purpose. I thought you'd want to see him alone. Everybody does when they're in a hole."

"Yes," said Jessie. "If he'd only ask her, find out and tell me. What is it? What frightened her?"

She stopped short and turned to look at him as if she could drag something out of him the sooner.

"Charles, I tell you," said John.

And they went on.

"How could he frighten her? He wouldn't — ?" She stopped.

"Lay hands on her?" said John violently. "Strike her? I don't know. I don't know anything about Charles — except one thing. He's yellow, all through, yellow."

He could hear her catch her breath at that and told himself he loved her for taking such passionate care of Helen. She didn't seem now like that rather brusque, boyish person she had been that first night, but another self of Helen, strangely like her and yet different, subservient to her beauties, born to guard them. They had turned the corner, and she stopped.

"See that man up there," she said. "Just above my number. He was there when I came out, walking up and down. Could it be — ?"

"Charles? Come on. We'll see if it is."

"No," said Jessie. "I'd rather be alone. If he sees you coming, he'll go along."

"Let him. I'll follow him. If it's Charles, if he's waiting for Helen —"

"Then come behind me," said Jessie, "quite a little way

behind. I'll look straight at him. I want to know. And if he saw you and made off you couldn't — ”

“ I couldn't sprint,” said John bitterly, “ with a game leg. Right. Go ahead.”

She went on up the hill and the man turned as she approached him and walked slowly in advance of her. But Jessie quickened her steps, almost running lightly, and passed him. She seemed about to turn a corner, wheeled and came back facing him, looking at him squarely. It wasn't Charles, quite evidently, but there was something familiar about the pale face under the electric light, the large nose and square chin. Jessie walked up to him.

“ You've been hanging about our door,” she said. “ What are you doing it for? Why, it's Cross!”

Cross took off his hat and stood holding it, with a sort of sad dignity.

“ Yes, Miss Jessie,” he said, in his old tone of humble propriety. “ Can I do anything for you?”

John came up and also halted, not speaking.

“ But,” said Jessie — “ John, this is Cross, you know.”

“ Oh, yes,” said John. “ I know Cross. You were watching the house. What for?”

“ I saw Mrs. Tracy out alone last night,” said Cross, with an unshattered dignity. “ It didn't seem to me quite safe. If anybody spoke to her, it might be a little awkward. So, as I've time on my hands, I thought I'd hang about in case madam was out alone, and perhaps I could overlook her, as you might say, and make sure she wasn't annoyed.”

“ Was she annoyed last night?” asked John. “ Where was she when you saw her?”

“ Oh,” said Cross easily, “ just walking up the hill the

same as Miss Jessie here. But it struck me it would be safer to hang about a little and make sure."

"You're a good soul, Cross," said Jessie. "But what do you mean about having time on your hands? Aren't you on duty this evening?"

"No, miss," said Cross, "I am not with Mr. Tracy at present."

"Oh, ho!" said John. "How long since?"

"Not very long," said Cross. "And having a little time on my hands — good night, Miss Jessie. Good night, sir."

"We'll look out for her, Cross," Jessie called after him, as he turned away up the hill. "She sha'n't go out alone."

"Thank you, miss," said Cross, and took on a quicker gait.

"Funny," said John, as they walked their few steps back to Jessie's door. "What's Charles want to get rid of him for? He's the incarnation of British pomp. Charles can't have set up a private detective bureau, can he? Cross, I mean, Cross shadowing Helen. And being dismissed a put-up job? He can't be in Charles's pay?"

"Cross?" said Jessie. "Heavens, no! Where's your psychology? Cross has stepped straight out of Trollope. If he's lost his job he'll go back there again. You'll find him to-morrow in one of the volumes at the Athenæum."

## XV

NORRIS, sitting up in his work-room, was reading the *Voice*. John had brought him in a file, dating from the day Charles began to run it, and he was going through it with the accurate painstaking of the man used to print. And when he had finished and brought it up to the present day, he leaned back in his chair and thought wonderingly over the power of the written word. And it seemed to him most glorious and also most pernicious. For here was Charles wielding a tremendous force and apparently all for good, and Norris was sure it wasn't for good but, whether intentionally or not, for evil. Men of mind and decency were pushing the administration toward war, and Charles was, without one word for which he could be held accountable, holding back. How was he doing it? He was dwelling on the enormous influence of an America at peace, with her powers untrammelled for developing her resources. He was bidding her husband her resources for the big drain there would be on them when the war was over. She would be needed then to rebuild her sister nations. Perhaps sending supplies to Europe now merely kept weakened nations staggering on in the fight, when it was to their own destruction they were going. Could they be saved before it was too late? Would nothing be left of beautiful France before the awful might of Germany? Would the terrible monster paralyze even more mighty England? For Germany was mighty. She had nourished herself on blood, she was like the dragons of old, only per-

haps she could not be slain. Perhaps the only campaign against her was a campaign of education, of enlightenment. She had trained her children to hate. If the abominable slaughter would cease, could we persuade them to understand, to love?

Norris smiled a little, grimly, as he went on. You would have thought Charles was a sucking dove of peace and irrational hope and all the softer virtues. Charles laid great stress on the might of Germany. What was the use, he asked, in many forms, of making a useless struggle against a power which had eaten and drunk and slept war for half a century? Why not ignore the old madnesses and learn whether Germany also could be civilized by the only methods that were permanent, ploughshares and pruning hooks put to their legitimate use? Charles saw a roseate America sitting up in the clouds counseling her sister states, and able to hold her dizzy height not because she had won a stage apotheosis through the triumph of virtuous deeds, but had been blown sky-high by the blast of words. And Norris began to see anew what a terrible power lies in the printed word. He had always regarded his own profession as something that concerned himself alone. His aptitude for words was something to have fun with, he might have said in his lightest moments, something to earn your living from, if you were clever enough, but really a tricky companion, by the hearth to-day, to-morrow off into the open. But as there had been no time like this time of war, so it had brought out values obscured by the dust of every day. Here were the newspapers giving the people the one chance of being heard, and at the same time pushing on the laggards in power to the only logical outcome of Germany's insolence. They were the only weapon the people had left, and in the main they were



sane and valiant and he thanked God for them. But here was another sort of newspaper, and behind it was Charles who also had the right of free speech, so long as he made it innocent enough to avoid condemnation. And Charles, Norris knew in his soul, was not straight. But the reading world didn't know that. He could sit hidden behind the obscurity of the editorial cloud and direct his printing presses to spread poison broadcast, and the poison was sweet to the taste, and what should the world know?

And while he thought, John came to his door, hesitating lest father should be at work, and yet curious to find out what he thought of the *Voice*. Norris threw down the copy in hand to the pile on the floor and nodded at him, and John came in and leaned on the mantel and waited for his father to speak. Yet Norris seemed to make his shot rather wide of the mark.

"I sometimes wish," he said, "printing never'd been invented."

"Pretty bad, isn't it?" John inquired dispassionately.

"Yes, mighty bad for anybody that sees through it. And that's the devil of it. Not one in ten will see. The old ladies — men and women — will think it's great stuff. Why, I've had proof of that in the last three days. You know I went to read for that benefit. Some of 'em came up and congratulated me on what Charles was doing for the *Voice*. They said he had vision."

"Vision!" said John. "Charles! vision nothing!"

Then Norris, like his father, remembered the gang and also that he hadn't found a trace of them in the file.

"I thought he'd bought them," he said. "That's what you were rowing about."

"He has bought 'em," said John. "And I begin to see his hand."

“Well?”

“He has their entire output. If it’s to the detriment of Germany he’s going to hold it up — not publish it, you see. That chokes ’em off everywhere.”

Norris, in an irrepressible uneasiness, confronted his son. The deep red that ran into his face looked like anger. But John wasn’t quelled. He knew if it were anger there was also a mixture of sharp alarm in it, apprehension, and for his other son. But Norris got hold of himself, turned away and took refuge in the act of the embarrassed natural man and kicked the fire.

“Well,” he said when he turned back, with an effort at ease, “perhaps you’ll tell me how a man with a reasonable head for business — Charles is pretty keen — how he can bring himself to squander the salary of three men in order to throw away their work with it.”

“Charles may not have to stint himself,” said John. “Presumably he’s got backers.”

“Who are they?”

“I don’t know. But whoever they are, they represent Germany.”

“John!” Norris threw it at him in an exaggerated protest, to recall him to the magnitude of what he implied.

“I know it,” said John obstinately. “You think it’s awful to be bought up by Germany and more awful because it’s one of us. But fellows are being bought up every day. Some of ’em know it and some of ’em don’t. Charles knows it.”

Norris turned back to the fire. He said nothing, and John, swept by one of the waves that took him off his feet, when he wondered why the world couldn’t be different and be quick about it, found an indignant question tumbling from him:

“Dad, what’s the matter with families anyway?”

“Matter?” Norris turned, relieved at least that something impersonal could draw them away from Charles until he had time to think things over. “With families?”

“It’s a kind of bluff,” said John, fretting himself by formulating. “Everybody’s pretending everybody’s better than he is, so as to make him better. Nobody’ll say exactly what he thinks for fear of hurting something. I don’t know that we are so afraid of hurting one another. We’re afraid of hurting the great family god that’s set up in the midst of us — tumbling him down and cracking him. Now we all know exactly how Charles is likely to act in a given situation, and yet we never assume he’d act so. When he comes in, we butter him all over, if he’s good, and when he isn’t we’re sort of bruised and get over it the best way we can.”

“Well,” said Norris, “what would you recommend?”

He spoke with a grave interest, and John saw he wasn’t being chaffed and answered at once:

“I should treat him like an outlaw. He is one. He doesn’t care a hang for any known rule that holds the whole blooming show together, and when he wants to break one he does. And we never act as if he’d done it. We say, ‘Come in and take a chair.’”

“Well, what should we say? No, I mean it. I want your point of view.”

“We should say: ‘Oh, come off. You’ve just been mixed up in a dirty deal in the market. You smell of it. Get out. Come back when you’ve thrown your loot into the Charles and had a Turkish bath.’ Or, this is what I’d say: ‘You’ve sold yourself to Germany, haven’t you? Go give yourself up to the D. of J. or we’ll do it for you.’”

"What's the D. of J.?"

"Department of Justice."

"Heroic methods," said Norris. But he didn't say it satirically. "You've evidently cast me for the rôle of the Roman father."

"I told grandsir I didn't believe in families," said John, and then stopped. He wasn't going to repeat any one of grandsir's replies and have it discussed openly in family council afterward and perhaps get back to grandsir's ears. He had an inside track, he felt; that last time he had gone further, an inch or two, into grandsir's inner mind, and he wasn't going to lose his chance by sharing it. But he had got his father's attention now.

"You did," said Norris. "Now what did grandsir say?"

"That's telling," remarked John.

"Oh, come! but wait a bit. Here's your mother. See what she says about families." Emily was passing on one of her noiseless trips about the house. "Emily!"

She came to the door and stood there, inquiring, sweet, in her readiness for any appeal from her men children. John, looking at her, was struck, as he was a dozen times a day, in his impetuous fashion, with the beauty of her.

"Say, mum," he asked, "what makes you look like a madonna?"

"It's her blue dress," said Norris practically, "and the white top and sleeves. There! that's family candor. How do you like it? Emily, John's been telling me he has a new idea. He says families don't tell each other the truth."

"Don't they?" asked Emily, frowning a little as she noted a finger mark on the door and charged herself to remember it. "Maybe not."

"He says," Norris continued, "we ought to keep jumping on each other for our faults—little ones like my getting ashes round—and when we've done anything really bad, have in the police."

Emily was turning away. She realized this was one of the times when the family was talking nonsense, and she had things to do. But she usually had a word in readiness.

"John'll know," said she, "when he's married."

"Aha! that's the answer," said Norris. He felt at once lightened and relieved. "I knew there was an answer, but I didn't know what page 'twas on. That's it. You'll know when you're married."

"Married!" John threw out, in the scorn of the untrammelled.

But Emily was calling from the floor below:

"Here's Charles. He's coming up."

And John, in the moment before Charles appeared, had time to think here was another example of the family perfidy in making things go. Charles had kissed mother, he was sure, and she hadn't told him to wait and explain his behavior in the *Voice* before he could be permitted filial privileges. John was as old as youth in his cleverness, but young as youth in his rebellions. And here was Charles, fresh, smiling, ready to be responsive to the family tradition, and Norris grinned at himself ruefully for his sneaking relief that Charles was luckily in a good frame of mind. There wouldn't be any bone to worry. But he hadn't reckoned on John, who, for mischief's sake at least, was going to be as good as his implied word.

"Well, Charles," said he, on his way to the door, to make instant exit when his bolt was sped, "you've been going the pace, haven't you? Insulting Helen and getting yourself bought by Germany."

He walked quietly out, but even at the moment he was sorry he had elected to go, he did so want to see how Charles looked. But Norris was seeing how he looked and he was appalled. For the instant his own heart fell with a thump, it was so horribly certain the shot had told. Charles, coming in with the fresh color of his walk upon him, was white as yellow-white paper. He stood there looking down at his feet, his lips put tight together as if he had to have some slight physical stimulus of holding himself firm. They stood there a full minute, Norris staring at him, unwillingly, but because it seemed a necessity to inform himself of everything possible about his son. Then, as Charles threw off the cloud, laughed shortly and sat down, Norris, spurred, he felt angrily, by John's invisible influence, asked him:

"What does he mean by saying you've annoyed Helen?"

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Charles, now returning his father's glance with an open one. "What's he said to you?"

"Nothing — about Helen."

"Well," said Charles, "if he knows anything about Helen's present frame of mind, I wish he'd tell me. I don't."

"Charles," said Norris, bursting into what he felt might be considered his duty and hating it all tremendously, "what's this about the *Voice*?"

"What about it? Something John's been getting up?"

"I've looked the paper over myself. I don't —" He paused. What should he say? The *Voice* was irreproachable and the best of women declared Charles had vision.

"Don't like it? Well, I won't say I've managed to get precisely the right note yet. But I shall."



"I don't find anything of Bailey's or Finch's or Brennan's."

"Oh, they'll come later. I had a lot of stuff to work off. Some of the old staff. I don't mean to keep 'em on, but I've got to give 'em time to look round a little. Only decent, you know."

Yes, it was only decent. Everything looked so simple, so above-board, when Charles presented it to you. Norris didn't, in his soul, trust him in the least when he had a reason for dodging; but it is difficult to suspect a man in a particular instance when he comes to you with shining morning face, even if the face does grow yellow under insult and only regains the shine after a delay.

"I suppose John's been stuffing you," said Charles wearily. "John's a kid. He reads fairy tales and fastens 'em on me. I wish he wouldn't. It makes me tired. But I can't go into that. Fact is, I came round to ask you if you'd give me the key to Grasslands."

"Grasslands?" Norris was immensely surprised.

"Yes. I'm going to ask you to hand the place over to me this winter and keep mum about it to mother, John — and grandsir. The whole push. I'd like to be able to run down there when I feel like it, and I don't want any living soul — but you — to know why. Fact is, I'm not very fit."

"What's the matter, Charles?" asked Norris. "Worried?"

"Yes. I'm infernally worried about Helen. She won't come back to me, she won't see me, and it's wearing on me like the devil. I can't sleep, that's the truth of it, and I want to keep Grasslands open, put in a man and a woman, and have it so I can run down any time I like and see if I can get a night's rest."

"Seen a doctor?"



"Yes."

"What'd he say?"

"Says I'm evidently done up — worry — business worry, he assumes. I haven't told him. He prescribes the country."

"Of course you can have Grasslands," said Norris. "But you'd better let me tell your mother."

"That's precisely what I can't stand. I'm on edge. Don't you see I'm on edge?"

Norris understood perfectly. He had been on edge himself more than once when he couldn't bear the touch of human sympathy. Except Emily's: but that amounted to no more than a silent knowledge of his plight.

"You know," he ventured, "your mother's different."

"I know she's different," said Charles. "But you take it from me I've got to work this out alone. I've a man and woman in mind."

"Who are they — anybody down there?"

"No. Somebody I picked up through my new butler. Cross is gone."

"Cross! What'd he go for?"

"Oh, I don't know. Cross hasn't been the same lately. But he's gone. Glad he has. He got on my nerves, too."

"Well," said Norris. He felt vaguely disconcerted over the going of Cross. "Of course you can have Grasslands. Mind if I run down with you sometime when you're going?"

"That's it," said Charles. He looked harassed. "I want to go by my lone. Run down in the car after dark, if the snow holds off. I want to feel it's a jumping-off place, and when I'm there I haven't got to exert myself for anybody."

"Of course," said Norris, rather unreasonably hurt

though he thought he understood so perfectly. "I won't go down. Sure you've got a reliable man and woman?"

"Oh, sure."

"What's their name?"

"Weiss."

"Not German?"

"Oh, the name's German, but they've lived here a generation or so."

"Where'd you get 'em?" Norris persisted, moved by he hardly knew what solicitude.

"A man at the club, I've forgotten who. But their references are absolutely all right. New York people. Want to give me the key now?"

Norris got up and went to his desk with a certain slow thoughtfulness of motion. There was absolutely no reason why Charles, in his need, should not have the key of Grasslands which was as sacred to him, as a family hearthstone, Norris thought, as to the rest of them. Yet he had a curious disinclination to giving it up.

"There it is," he said. "This one's the barn, this the garage. You'll have to have the water turned on, you know, and for Heaven's sake look out for the pipes."

Charles thrust the keys into his pocket and nodded assent.

"And mind you don't say a word, dad," he adjured his father. "That's really the whole point. If it wasn't for that I might as well go to a hotel."

"No," said Norris, "I won't. But I'd much rather, you understand—at least, your mother. She never'd disturb you."

"They'd be coming down," said Charles, now at the door. "John would. All his crowd. Then the fat really would be in the fire. 'Bye."

## XVI

JOHN was as often with Helen and Jessie as he could artfully manage. Though Helen had begun by keeping to herself, not implicating the family, even by asking counsel, she gave that up, in large measure, because they were persistent in cordiality and Jessie so eager to respond. John had not had so much fun in a long time. He could run about with Jessie, agree with her professionally, fight her as high spirits bade, and — bitterest compensation for his own absence from the field — draw her on to talk about France, that harsh adventure of hers, bearing her youth to the perilous outskirts of war; and always he could count on a little of Helen, perhaps a long evening of her or at least a minute for a commonplace yet memorable word. Jessie, practically subservient to Helen, was nevertheless, she said, in all relations frankly jealous of her. She was brazen in her protest, to the amused tolerance of Helen, that her sister wasn't really so remarkable. She wasn't the trouble maker of old Troy, though there seemed to be an impression to that effect. She was no more than a sound, sensible, rather sweet — yes, very sweet — person whose eyelids fell in an unexpected way and whose mouth had tricks at the corners. Helen hardly listened. She went on with what she was doing, gravely absorbed, often absurdly so in some most inconsiderable task, and when the light hail of chaff did fall persistently enough, waked out of her absorption and threw in the comment of a word, "Goose!" it might be, or "Silly Billy!"

And the word itself, as may be seen, was likely to be of a most ordinary nature, such as anybody can fish out of common talk; but from her it had the value of piquant repartee. Jessie, in this interval before the relief, unspeakably desired, of going back to France, was living up to her last limit of self-control. She must not be curious, she must not worry Helen. She must simply give Helen the warmth and softness of her breast and wings until the eggs of decision were duly hatched. Yet there was a turbulent happiness in it all. She had Helen to herself and John to fight with, only she did sometimes wonder, in her own humble mind, why he couldn't like her at least a little when he liked Helen so much. She did frankly delight in him, and when he was forgetful of her, sometimes brusque and unregarding, it hurt. Like other tomboys, Jessie did not wholly enjoy being treated cavalierly. In her heart she was aching with compassion for him because he was lame, and that, now there was such need of man's muscle and fitness, made him, she knew, "ugly."

One night shortly after John's talk with his father, he rang and found the sisters at their table, rather washed out and dull, he thought, both of them. It was not inappropriate to Helen. Everything became her, pallor or brightness. Jessie, he concluded, had better get back her shine; that is, if she cared about such things. He rather thought she didn't. Helen went on folding compresses, and Jessie got up to bring forward a chair a little, enough to give a look of welcome. "Poor boy!" she was thinking. "Dear boy! I wonder if he's aching." For John also was not at his best. Only his trouble was of the mind. Behind Helen's shoulder he held up a card to Jessie. He had written on it, "I want to see her alone."

Jessie's rush of compassion ceased. It might have spurted up in a geyser and frozen in falling back on her, she felt so chilled.

"Well, you won't," she said viciously, and sat down again to her folding.

"Won't what?" Helen asked.

"Smoke," said Jessie. "You don't want him to either."

"Smoke?" said Helen. "Of course he can smoke. Was that really it? Why, you're a rude little girl. See, John, matches on that tray."

John seated himself by the hearth and scorned even to look at Jessie, who was nothing, his grown-up manhood told him, but a tomboy anyway. And since she was blocking him, he would ignore her and speak out.

"Helen, are you afraid of Charles?"

And saying it, he realized he was mortally afraid. He couldn't look at her. He took the tongs and clattered them nervously over a stick, and the noise helped him out a little, though Jessie twitched and said crossly:

"Don't!"

Helen had let her hands fall and rest on the cloth she was folding. She looked down at them and seemed to think. But she wasn't going to resent the question. John, glancing round at her now, saw that and choked with gratitude.

"No," she said at length, as if in grave consideration, "I don't believe I am."

John put down the tongs and thrust his hands into his pockets because they were trembling and that little devil of a Jessie would, he told himself, be sure to see it. And now he knew he was in for it and must go on.

"Hasn't something happened, Helen?" he insisted, though timidly. "Didn't you meet him one night when

you were coming over to the house? Didn't you get a scare?"

"I did see him," said Helen, still speaking slowly, because she had made up her mind not to admit any of them into the obscure recesses of her relations to Charles. "And I was—disturbed. But that was natural, John. Don't think about it."

"Did he speak to you?" John persisted. Now he was not trembling. He felt sure of himself and his right as male inquisitor.

"Yes," said Helen. "He spoke to me."

"What did he say?"

"He wanted me to go home with him." And then, as the remembrance of the persuasion he had used, that password to the old-time fondnesses, came back to her, her face flushed to its deepest rose and she glanced at John imploringly, as if begging him to say no more. But the flush angered him. She looked divinely tender, and he thought how unjust it was that Charles should have had the power to call that transfiguring glow to her face, should have had it and thrown it away.

"You were frightened," he said doggedly. "And Cross knew it, or he wouldn't have said what he did."

The rose of tenderness had paled. She looked at him, alarmed.

"What has Cross been saying?"

"We found him outside here the other night," said Jessie, "when we came home." She was deep in the interest of the moment now; there were things Jessie, too, wanted to be assured of. "He said he was hanging round in case you came out. To see that nothing happened to you. He said you oughtn't to go out alone."

"Oh, he mustn't do that," said Helen. "Charles

wants him there, most evenings, anyway. He'll be discharged."

"Oh, he's been discharged all right," said John. "That is, he's left."

"Left? Left the house? Left Charles? Oh, that's very dangerous. Cross knows a great deal. He must. Far more than I do."

John felt the force of this admission like a blow. He was like the seeker who, on the track of one bit of fact, finds another far more astounding.

"Helen," he said, "what do you know about Charles—what in particular? There's something. It's what made you leave him."

And then he remembered that it was, according to his own certainty, Mrs. Davenport who had made her leave him, and he stopped, most miserable. Helen looked from one to the other, in a wretched questioning. Jessie answered it.

"No," she said. "I haven't been talking you over in any way you wouldn't like. Not one of us, not a word."

"Then," said John, "Jessie knows. You've told her what you wouldn't tell us. Helen, don't you think you ought to tell us?—grandsir and father and me anyway. Grandsir'd know what to do and I could do it. Bet your life I would."

Helen was reassured. John evidently knew nothing. It was his sweetness to her, his chivalry, that made him speak.

"John," she said, "you're a dear." And now the tenderness, though without that rosy, ineffable quality, was his. "But I can't talk, even to grandsir. And there's nothing to do, John, not yet. Just you let me sit here and fold—and think—and who knows but I shall get somewhere?"



"Anyhow it's not fair," said John. "That's what grandsir and I said the other night, and then I repeated it to father and he didn't deny it. Families are the deuce. They're founded on lies and they thrive on 'em."

"Actually?" asked Helen, her eyes dancing at him. "How are they founded on lies?"

"In the first place, they begin with lies. Men and women go crazy and talk poetry — and send flowers — and sit in the moonlight, and — oh, I don't know. It doesn't last, that's all. It won't wash." Yet as he growled it out, he knew, in that deepest part of him that was only lighted up at night when you could smell the flowers and hear the music, that his love for Helen, if he had been permitted to cherish a love beyond clumsy brotherly service, would not need washing. It was perennially cleansed by the dews of heaven. "And then the family goes right on lying. You've got something against Charles, something awful. And if you'd out with it and tell us — the men of the family, I mean —" He was pointedly ignoring Jessie. Good for her, he thought, if Helen had already told her things she was keeping from the rest of them. "If you'd let us in, we could do something, and Charles would find himself up against it — and high time, too."

Helen had recovered her mobile calm. She was folding her compresses and smiling a little over them.

"I wonder," she suggested, "what your mother would say to that idea of family diplomacy."

"Oh, mother!" he exploded. "Father dragged her in."

"What did she say?"

"What d'you expect her to say? Mother's the worst of the lot. She won't lie, but she'll play the hose on us when we've got into the mud and make believe she's washed

us off, and then she'll burn Bengal lights and start rosy glows so we can keep on looking like little angels."

"Yes, but what did she say?" Helen insisted, in a demure mischief. "Tell me, or I'll ask her."

"Oh, she said," — he wasn't going to refuse a dare — "wait till I'm married."

"Quite right," said Helen placidly. "Mother's always right."

But at that moment John happened to look at Jessie, and he saw that her face was suddenly crimsoned with as sweet a flush as Helen's own. Only he suspected that flush in Jessie. It must mean something hostile to him.

"Well, I could, you know," he said darkly to her. "I could marry if I wanted to. You needn't look like that."

And Jessie took the challenge, lifted her head and gave him one of her defiant stares. But her eyes were different, he was curious to see. They were suffused and beautiful, and he had his first minute of wondering if she wasn't pretty after all. Not like Helen, only with a curious identity of charm. She was an earthly Helen, and the real Helen belonged among the stars. But Jessie was flinging back his dare.

"Yes, do," she said, "straight off. Only don't ask her in that voice, or you won't get her."

"And don't fight any more," said Helen. "You are like those figures that come out of the barometer. Only you don't appear one at a time. You dart out together and run at each other and begin to squabble."

"The barometer's out of order," said Jessie sadly. "That's all."

John got up to go. He felt defeated in his purpose, and the only thing now seemed to be a word with grandsir and presenting some of these half-cock conjectures to him.

Jessie put away her work in the quick orderly fashion she had for it because it was "business," and Helen, following more slowly, looked up and saw her then at the window. Several times Helen glanced up and found her immovable, and when she had laid away her own work she went to the window and put an arm about Jessie and they talked of the city lights. Presently Helen said:

"But I wish you were married."

"Do you?" asked Jessie. "After—"

"Yes," Helen broke in. "After anything. Babies! I wish we both had babies, Jess."

"Yes," said Jessie, "so do I."

And when they turned back into the room Helen saw her lashes were bright with tears.

## XVII

JOHN let himself in and went softly upstairs. His father's door might be open and he didn't propose being called upon and losing a minute he might have with grandsir. Allan Lloyd had now gone and John had not been allowed to take his place. A silent, deft young fellow had been brought in by the doctor, who had heard of him as studying intermittently, according as he got money, with a "crazy manipulator named Landis." But the boy, being strong and friendly, was a find for grandsir. And John, now that the routine of service had been once interrupted, boldly pushed in and did things himself, with such anxious care that grandsir was profoundly touched and would never have him rebuffed. John thought he knew a lot more about grandsir than the rest of the family, for he had dared penetrate the forbidden area and "found the old dear on his back," naked of that mantle of ironic endurance he had wrapped about himself: a wonder of fortitude, eaten up by torments and smiling at his plight. Was there a subtle bond between them because they both knew the curtailment of activities and the stab of pain? At least, neither acknowledged it. They were living the same gay masquerade, turning from their demon and letting him rage by himself, so far as human stoicism could.

There was a light in Norris's room, and John still be-

lieved he could slip past unnoted; but at the instant of reaching the stair-head he heard a voice on the silence within. It was the voice of Charles and he halted to listen. Everything Charles said just now was likely to be significant.

"Oh, cut it out, all that rent business. I told you to take the house and use it, — told you so in the beginning."

"I know," said Norris. "But I'd rather go through the form. Here's your check, boy."

Then John understood his father was offering it in payment of the rent of this which was Charles's house.

"Besides," Norris went on, the little indulgent twist of humor in his voice, "you insisted on its being only nominal, so it doesn't matter much either way."

"Except," said Charles, "you'll have to let me do the same. For Grasslands. See?"

"No," said his father. "That's quite another thing. Grasslands belongs to us all. Been down lately?"

They had the sound of settling to their talk.

"Yes," said Charles, "once."

"Sleep better there?"

"Yes. Can't tell you what a difference it made."

"Got your man and woman in?"

"Oh, yes. Soon as we had our talk. And by the way —" Charles became impressive. This, John saw, was important. "I'm going down Wednesday for the night. Don't let any of 'em bolt in on me, will you?"

"Any of 'em?"

"The family — mother, John — John especially."

"Why, no, I told you I wouldn't," said Norris. "Told you so in the first place. Nobody's any idea of going."

John turned and retreated down the stairs. He had doubts of getting past to grandsir's room unheard. More

than that, he wasn't sure he wanted to present grandsir with the floating particles of surmise he had collected at Helen's. He thought it might be better, on reflection, to mull over them himself. And when, from the library, he heard Charles go out at the front door, he was tempted to run up and say to his father: "What does it mean about his going to Grasslands? Yes, I listened. Of course I did. What's Charles up to?" But he abandoned this, too, and decided that if Charles didn't want him at Grasslands on Wednesday night, there he would be. It was all poppycock about not sleeping. Charles looked perfectly fit, though any mole but father could see he was drinking too much. Who was going down to Grasslands with him? Mrs. Davenport? If it was that sort of ignominy, somebody ought to know, somebody who would dare lift the veil of family dignity and let the law look at what was underneath, so that Helen could go undisturbed about the streets.

This was on Monday. On Tuesday John hung about the house to see whether Charles would come again. There might be more about Grasslands, and John was solidly "on the job." Charles did not come, and so he watched his father. Was Norris worried, thoughtful, as if he, too, knew the unusual was in the wind? But Norris, though grave as he was ordinarily through this time of stress, seemed unmoved, and John concluded that, whatever Charles had set on foot at Grasslands, his father was with him. There was "nothing doing," which indicated that Charles had been clever and there would be scope for everything doing later.

Something before half-past seven, on Wednesday, John left the house, and took the train at eight-fifteen. It had been a clear, cold day and the moon came up in splendor. The moon was important. It made some difference in

choosing whether to drive up from the station, little more than a quarter of a mile, or walk by the path through the woods and across the dry brook. It was going to be a gorgeous night, John told himself, snatching at the familiar water-indented stretches running past the car window. He was slightly exhilarated and boyishly expectant, as he always found himself on the road to Grasslands. He loved the place, and had liked staying in town far less than those other winters when he had done it for days at a time with Grasslands open, warm and waiting. He was slow in leaving the train, because Charles also might be on it, and when he did get off, went down to the farther end of the platform, avoiding the waiting baggage man and taxi-driver, and struck off into the road. He would walk, he decided, and he would not take the field path. There was no wind, and the air sprung keen, with an edge, but sweet. Making stout use of his stick, he set off at a good pace, though he did find, half-way perhaps, that his leg and back were not in their best condition and might, if tried too recklessly, let him in for a pain he had characterized, once for all, when he first passed it over to the doctor, to be dealt with, as "the devil." But he was presently, without misadventure, going up the driveway to his father's house, and here, rounding the last curve, he stopped, mentally greeting the big, rambling structure, and loving it. He could even forget Charles, the house so brimmed his imagination, sitting there in a calm amplitude, the leaf-traceried moonlight dripping over its white-pillared porch and quivering shadows from the embowering rowan tree lying thick upon the roof. John leaned on his stick and looked, and it was all so intimate and dear that he ignored for a moment the story told by the lights in the front rooms of the lower floor and in one room above.



So Charles was there. And why was he there and who was with him? For he was not the man to go off on a solitary quest for sleep.

John went forward and up the steps. All the shades were drawn, but he could see the lines of light at the sides. He got out his key and fitted it in the lock, and, recalled now to a keen sense of possibilities, found himself warm with anticipation. What was he to find? Charles, beyond a doubt, and Charles, interrupted, spied upon, indubitably furious. But that rather added to the moment's piquancy. He was not afraid of Charles. He opened the door softly and went in, and immediately a voice rose as if to lose no time in giving him the clue to what he was to find, Charles's voice, strictly courteous, yet irritated as Charles was when he did not believe himself to be in every sense master of the situation.

"Speak English, Captain Pfaff, will you? All you chaps know as much English as I do, and I haven't enough German to count in."

"Pardon!" was the instant reply from four or five male voices, and then a roughish one with a pronounced accent replied:

"I was saying you would find all the papers in the dispatch bag. Mine I have here. My instructions are to return at once. My crew is already assembled and waiting for me. I understand I am to be taken to the little town—what do you call it? It is a short walk from there."

"My car will take you down," said Charles. "My man will drive you. He's all right. And you'll be off to-night."

"In the early morning," said the voice. "*Morgen Stunde*,— you know the proverb."

And there were choruses of "Ja, Ja," and again "Pardon," probably in the direction of Charles, and one pains-

taking voice explained pedantically, no doubt for his enlightenment:

“It means, ‘The morning hour has gold in its mouth.’”

“Well, Captain Pfaff,” said Charles, now in his voice of high good humor, “we wish you luck. We’ll have in some fizz and toast you. Fair winds above and friendly currents below, no collisions with mermaids, no running up against a whale, no salt water Lorelei. By George! you fellows have got the sand. I’m reasonably cool-headed myself, but under water—not me!”

“I am a Prussian,” said the voice, with a strong rolling of the “r.” “We are Germans all.”

There was a scattering chorus of applause. But on that a new voice came out with a piercing clearness:

“There’s a cold draft here.”

“Shut the door,” Charles interrupted. “We ought to have shut it anyway. Can’t be too careful.”

But the voice went on, in what was evidently a sharpness of discovery and alarm:

“No! no! it’s that outside door. Some one has opened it. Some one is in the hall.”

John, at that, shut the outside door with a distinct bang, and went forward to the library. At the sound of the door, there had been also a confusion of chairs hastily pushed back and feet upon the floor, and John, looking in at them, with what he hoped was a cheerful self-possession, saw men standing about the library table, all looking at him in most evident anger and alarm. Charles alone was not in any sense taken aback. He was merely furious. John knew that blackness of the brow and braced himself. But he didn’t waste time in meeting and defying it. Charles he could see any day. He must take in the rest of the scene, learn the faces of the other men, photograph

them on his memory. They were all of the Teuton type, pink-skinned and yellow-haired, and the one with the worn, seasoned face, with the bag before him on the table, was, he was sure, Captain Pfaff. Yes, and another he absolutely knew. This was a naturalized American citizen, a German who had for months been protesting, perhaps with too great ardor, his adherence to the ideals of democracy. He was a tall, thick man of a ruddy countenance and flowing beard, and now he looked indubitably scared, and John exulted. He thought for an instant of calling to him: "How d'ye do, professor? I've just read the report of your lecture on *The American Ideal*." And there was another man, noticeable for the sheer worry of his look. He was a sanguine fellow with a short, disorderly red beard, an irregular, twitching mouth and enormous ears. The mouth twitched as he confronted John and the forehead, too, drew into lines and his eyelids snapped. His was decidedly, after Captain Pfaff's, the most provocative face there, and that from its extremity of apprehension. The other three might have been business or professional men, but they all wore a like look of concentration and perhaps anxiety. This John's eyes told him in an instant, for almost at once Charles had spoken, slowly, concisely, not raising his voice:

"What the devil do you want?"

"My Elizabethan Dramatists," said John pleasantly and without hesitation. "Going to have some eats? If you are, I'll stay."

"No," said Charles, blacker by a shade, and also profoundly puzzled. He didn't know what to make of John, he didn't know what to do with him, and John, seeing it, could have whooped for joy. It was a species of triumph over old Charles who was so clever, and he felt the swag-

gering importance of finding himself clever, too. "No, we're not here to eat. I'm trying to arrange some sort of service for getting reliable news out of Germany — whether she's starving, that sort of thing. If she is, that means more to the Allies than any victory of arms."

A murmur of assent ran round the table. But, John saw, they were watching him — all except Captain Pfaff, whose eyes never left the leather bag before him on the table — and watching him unpleasantly.

"I'll run up and get my books," said he, with a nod to Charles. "Then I shall have to cut. I may get the next train in town."

He left his stick leaning against the end of the settle by the library door and did go upstairs and into his own room at the back of the landing. There he paused a moment in the dark, found his breath was coming faster than it need, after a run upstairs, and asked himself ironically if he was afraid of those Johnnies down there, afraid of Charles? He rather thought not. But they were unpleasant, those fellows, Charles' most of all. Crooks, all of them. He had no more than a literary acquaintance with crooks and found he was pleasurably excited, on the whole, and ready to learn more. He hadn't done any good by bursting in on them, possibly only harm by putting them on their guard and making them crookeder; at least he had come on Charles's hidden nest and the only thing to do now was to go away with the little germ of conjecture he had filched and see if he could quicken it. In the minute or two while he debated these things, he stood still in the dark. Either he hadn't thought of switching on the light, which afterward seemed to him incredible, there in his own room when it was always his first act on entering, or it was tinglingly appropriate to the occasion

to lurk in blackness, listening to his own breath and thinking thoughts of Charles. But now, when it struck him he had been there long enough, he turned to his book-case, made a random clutch at some books, went out of the room with two of them, and down the stairs. Captain Pfaff, his bag before him on the wooden settle, was jerking on his short, thick coat. He did not look up, but at the instant of John's reaching the foot of the stairs there came a call from the library:

"Captain Pfaff! one moment."

The captain stepped to the library door leaving his bag behind him on the settle. John slid his books under the settle, took his stick noiselessly from the end of it, seized Captain Pfaff's bag in the same hand, opened the door softly and shut it behind him, and went down the steps, stumbling in his haste. He skirted the front of the house and made for the orchard at the right, for the field path was beyond. There were lights in the garage he had to pass, and outside it two big touring cars. Whether men were hanging about here he could not see, but he fancied, stopping for an instant, he caught a sound of low-toned talk. Even if there were loiterers, it seemed hardly probable they would get wind of him, as he walked cautiously on the soft brown grass at the edge of the drive; also he covered the ground at his best, which was not inconsiderable for, though his back had begun to growl at him, he had a good stride. Presently, in the orchard, he did halt to listen, and at that moment heard the starting of a car. It did not, he was certain, stop at the house, but went directly along the drive and out to the road. This seemed to indicate that Charles had assumed he would go by the road and had taken a car to follow him. As soon as they found he had not chosen the road — and they would prove

that in short order—Charles would know where to go. The field path—he would think of that instantly, and he would come striding fast on foot. The danger of delay admonished John, and he plunged along through the orchard and felt briefly more secure, for now he was in the shadow of the woods. The moon was shining through those drifts of cloud where the upper winds were moving, and he could see in the patches of her revealing the stones and the trunks he had known all his life, as familiar to him as his own hand. Charles would know where to track him. To Charles also these were beaten paths. Undenially he did feel a creep of panic over that: Charles in chase, Charles in the brutality of rage. John worshipped courage before every virtue, because he knew the wincings inevitable to a man who is not physically fit, who dreads the anguish of a brutal stroke, but at the touch of fear he stepped into the woods and stood there, breathing hard. Cover for an instant he must have, the shadow of the dear trees he knew, and safety from that betraying, impersonally cruel jade of a moon. And as his breath stilled and his courage rose, he thought there was some one near him in the wood. A stumble, the snapping of twigs under a man's foot, then silence; if some one was there it was behind him, the orchard way. Had he been followed? If he was to be overtaken, it was more to be dreaded in what had, a moment before, seemed a safe obscurity.

He stumbled out into the path again and ran. Was he still followed? Now he was not sure. On the little stone causeway that crossed the brook he stopped again to listen, and the moment his feet touched it he knew what he was to do. The stone itself gave him a hint, a friendly invitation. This was the old play place, the "hidey-hole" for boyish treasures. He stepped down to the edge



of the brook and, with no debating of that mental suggestion, thrust the bag into the space under the bridge, stepped up the bank again and went slowly on. He continued to walk slowly, not looking round, and his mind was calm. Let them come now, if they chose. The bag was safe.

As he went on toward the station, his mood shifted, and instead of feeling the necessity of stealing Captain Pfaff's bag he recognized the immense absurdity of it. What if he did distrust Charles profoundly? What if six men in the library at Grasslands were indubitably Germans? Had he any right in reason to pick up a bag that didn't belong to him and "beat it" like the criminal he was? He got very merry over it, all by himself, and by the time he reached the station and walked into its circle of light, he was in a pleasant frame of mind. No one but the baggage master was there, and he had a few neighborly words with him, giving, on request, an itemized assurance of the health of all the Tracys. The train pulled in on time and he mounted his car, but stood on the platform to the last that, if Charles should come, they could encounter in a decent privacy. But though Charles did not appear, the professorial author of the American Ideal did, and near that last minute. He was running and would have made his objective easily if he had taken the car nearest him; but seeing John in possession of the last platform of all, he changed his course for that. The train was moving, and John had time to think, "Fall if you like, you fool, and break your precious neck—I won't help you," when the idealist surged up the steps and did come down on his knees at the top, and John dropped his stick and dragged him up. But the stick was gone and John said, "O the devil!" while the idealist dusted his own knees and demanded violently:



"Where is it?"

"Overboard," said John, making his way in, and with difficulty, for lurking pain had begun to remind him: "Forgotten me, have you? I'll show you." The idealist was at his elbow, supporting him, and he jerked his arm away. "Let me alone, can't you?" he inquired, but the idealist continued to put his demand, with guttural passion:

"Where is it? Where is it, I ask you?"

John had reached a seat where a mountain of a man slept, and wedged himself in beside him. He was not going to run the risk of seeking the whole seat further on and sharing it with his tormentor. But the fellow clung to his job. He stood in the aisle and again bent over him.

"Where is it?" he hammered on. "Where is it?"

"My stick?" said John, at last. "I hope old Jerry there at the station's picked it up. If not, I suppose the Portland train'll run over it."

"I do not mean your stick," said the idealist, with a reproachful bitterness. "You know I do not mean your stick. And where," he continued in an augmented outburst over a new and illuminative thought, "where are your books? You came, you said, to get books. It was a pretext. Where are they?"

"My books?" repeated John vaguely, clutching at an answer and finding none plausible enough. And then his leg twinged and his back replied according to a perfect system of agonized communication, and he ended: "You go —" And he told the idealist precisely where to go.

"It does not matter," said the man inexorably. "You may answer or not as you like. I shall not leave you."

Nor would he leave him, even though the conductor

suggested that there were "seats up front," and when they pulled into the station at Boston and John got up among the last because the pain was slashing now like knives and the possibility of being jostled made an added anguish, still the idealist was there, and, with an apparent concern, offering an arm. John looked at him this time; he didn't speak, and the man involuntarily fell back from the message in the white face and eyes shooting fury. But he kept behind until John had made his slow way to the taxi stand, and then he did come forward, saying doggedly:

"I shall drive with you."

John was just setting foot on the running board, but he withdrew it and faced his man.

"See here," said he. "If you are going with me, we won't take a taxi. I'll telephone the police and we'll order a patrol wagon. It's up to you."

The idealist, glowering, did fall back, and John crawled in and was driven home. And as he went, trying to brace himself against the jolts, he thought, with some bitter amusement still left, that the idealist could swear to Charles that his hands were empty. He had not been carrying a bag. And suddenly he bethought him of the books he had brought down from his room; they might have been Elizabethan Dramatists or they might not. He did not know. Whatever they were, he hadn't them now, nor could he possibly remember at what point he had got rid of them. The pain was bad enough for that.

## XVIII

THE next morning Emily, on her early trips about the house, found John's door slightly open and looked in. At the same moment he called to her, and she knew what had come to him, and, with a soft, inarticulate sound of mother trouble, she went to him. John, his forehead tied into a knot, was flat among the pillows.

"Oh, why didn't you call me in the night?" she said. She always blamed herself for not knowing if her dears had gone under. "When did it begin?"

"Last night," John said. "On the way home."

"And you got to bed the best way you could." But Emily was not one really to lament. "I think you'd better have your breakfast before I telephone the doctor."

"Don't start him up," said John. "He'd only give me tablets and I've got two or three of 'em left. They're somewhere round my bureau. You find 'em."

Emily looked, privately resolving she would have an extra prescription and keep it where she could lay hands on it. For she knew, and loved him for the boyish folly of it, that when an attack was over and John had rushed back to his ordinary activities he forgot his enemy would return. She did find the little box in a sea of shirt studs and cravats and, after he had gulped a tablet, smoothed him out a little, though he did so hate to be touched, the pain had such a way of resenting interference.

"Send me Erastus," he called after her, when she went

away. "Soon as grandsir's got through with him. Funny name! Let him bring my tray. Don't you come up again. I'm all right."

He was always all right, she reflected, with that hurt misery she had over him, as she went downstairs. You couldn't do anything for him, at these times of downfall, to show him what you felt. All he wanted was to be let alone, to lie submerged in his pillowed misery until he could come to the surface again and put on a brighter armor of bravado. Presently Erastus appeared, a round-faced, pink-cheeked colossus with a snub nose and inquiringly honest eyes. He didn't bring the tray. Mrs. Tracy thought he might do some things first, lift her son, it might be, and smooth up the bed.

"I'm terrible strong," Erastus volunteered. He did do a few muscular, gentle services, and then stood looking down at John with something like entreaty and yearning in his gaze.

"Funny, isn't it?" John inquired, glancing up at him, not offended, not ironical, but indifferently aware that there ought to be a community of amusement between them over a long hungry fellow laid by the heels and cast, like a foolish horse.

"No, I don't think it's funny," said Erastus gravely. "I think it's awful."

This savored of pity, and John involuntarily frowned.

"Well, don't look like that about it," he recommended. "What are you looking like that for anyway? You needn't cry."

Erastus passed over this. He was not going to cry, but he was perfectly willing to, if he could bring about a cure.

"You ought," said he, "to see Doctor Landis."

"Who's Doctor Landis?" John inquired.

“He’s the doctor I’m taking lessons of. It isn’t only that he knows about the skeleton—he’s studied it and he can draw it right off with two hands, one hand one side, one hand t’other, same as they say Doctor Richardson used to—but it’s as if he could look right into your body and see what’s the matter.”

“Oh, get out,” said John.

Erastus quietly and earnestly got out; but when he had reached the door John, repenting, since he had been kind and his hands were wonderful, called to him:

“What’s your other name?”

Erastus turned and said quietly:

“Triphammer.” Then, from habit, he answered the derision he was accustomed to when Triphammer burst upon a world unprepared. “It’s funny, ain’t it? Father said it was a French name once: I mean, the French was something like it. I don’t mind. It’s a pretty good name for a manipulator. Calls attention.” Then he went upstairs to grandsir.

John lay envying him. He had bone and muscle and flesh in the perfect proportion, and, though on so big a scale, he moved with ease and lightness. At that moment John admired nobody more than Erastus Triphammer. Presently his mother came with a tray and sat and fed him, so that he need not by the slightest movement wake the pain. It was hard for Emily to be altogether sorry when men fell into her hands to be comforted. The mother in her would passionately have desired to bear the pangs for them; but a savage, natural woman also in her slyly knew it had a horrid glee in getting them where she could offer herself up in sacrifice for their better care.

“Father’s coming up to see you,” she said, when he had

finished and closed his eyes with an ostentatious intent of getting rid of her.

"No," said John, "don't you let him. Not for an hour or so. I want to sleep."

"If you can sleep!" said Emily. "I'm thankful, dear, you can. I'll tell him. He'll be thankful, too."

She went out softly and John, his eyes shut to outer things, bade his mind go back to last night. He traversed every step of the way from the moment he stood at the library door and looked at Charles and his guests to his thrusting the bag under the bridge. There he left it and, turning back, went over the whole thing again. For the first time in his life, he was concerned for Charles. So natural was it, too, so normally did his misgivings rise from the events of the night that he didn't even wonder at them. That was the way it struck him. That was the way it was. He had been perfectly sure that Charles was about some shabby piece of business—whether in connection with outward affairs, at least where Helen was concerned—but now that he had the strongest guess-work to support the tale brought him by his eyes and ears, now that he was practically assured of the bigness of the crime and the peaks of honor it sought to foul, he was afraid: and for Charles. He had often wanted Charles to be tried at the family tribunal and given sentence, told he was indubitably an outlaw. But here he was indeed an outlaw and John was shrinking for him, smitten by an apprehension and remorse Charles would never feel, as if, being a part of that body corporate, the family, the family had sinned with him and must recover itself, repent and make amends. All this he did not think with definiteness. But he did lie there and ache mentally as well as physically, and it was, strangely, for Charles who had chosen the dark way.



Then there was a step on the stairs and he knew it was his father and was relieved because he had thought these things long enough. The door came open and some one walked in, and it was Charles. John, looking up at him, his pupils widened into black by the shock of seeing him there in his morning freshness, had an instant's throb of wonder about what would happen next. Charles, he knew, would question him, assault him with every known violence, to make him give up the secret of the night before. He might even lay hands on him — those fine, exquisitely kept hands — and drag the pain back into his half-deadened leg and spine, and John, who had made up his mind in the minute of this first shock, determined, with a dull obstinacy, that his own only weapon was silence. Whatever Charles asked him he would not speak. Also, in the shrinking inward depths of him, he would not even will his father to come or Erastus Triphammer, before Charles laid hold on him. This was a great moment for courage. Charles had never looked more unquestionably the fine type of the physical man. There seemed to be a great deal of him, yet in a different way from Erastus Triphammer's breadth and brawn. He had not taken off his overcoat, and the soft perfection of it became him. He stood at the bedside and looked down on his brother and John, to his amazement, saw that he did not appear to be angry at all. And John kept his eyes, the pupils of them black as ink now, the more immovably on Charles, for he was the more afraid.

"Mum told me I could come up," Charles began, smiling. It was Charles at his pleasantest. "If I didn't stay long. She said you'd been laid by the heels. It's an infernal shame."

Still John only looked at him and didn't speak. What did Charles want? The amount of energy it must have



taken to put on that sympathetic serenity, which looked more than skin deep, was great enough to have forged weapons of war. Why was Charles throwing so much force and fine work into his diplomacy?

"Never you mind," he continued. "It'll go as it came. Always does, as I remember. You'll be on your feet in a day or two. And when you are on your feet—do you see Brennan—or Finch or Bailey?"

"No," said John. He found, in a swift mental search, no reason why he shouldn't let up so far as to diverge to something sufficiently far away from last night. "I haven't set eyes on 'em—since they went over to you."

The last he could hardly be expected to deny himself, yet he wished instantly he had kept his mouth shut. There was bitterness in the words, and with Charles he must forego even that. "Don't get mad," he was always bidding himself when Charles began upon him—for everything between them seemed an onset, a beginning—"Don't let him say you're a kid." But Charles answered him with a perfectly open candor, as if he didn't see he had in any sense got a rise out of him.

"They're absurd. I don't know what to do with them. You see, I'm paying them perfectly corking prices for their stuff, and they're not doing anything I can use. And when I don't use it they turn round and imply it's my fault."

"What sort of stuff?" John asked.

"Violent—red flags—"

"Oh, no, it's not," said John, "if you mean socialism. They've been fighting socialism, tooth and nail. They haven't gone over to that."

"No, no," said Charles, qualifying. "I meant red

rag, I suppose. Attacking, pitching in, hammer and tongs. People aren't led that way. The only way to lead 'em is to persuade."

John said nothing. But he was slightly soothed in his raw sense of the boys' defection. They had at least the sand not to follow Charles's lead. And at that fortunate moment his mother came up the stairs and looked doubtfully in. She didn't want John harried when he was on his back; but the feel of the atmosphere slightly reassured her. Still she hardly liked the black intensity of his eyes. But Charles turned to her with the same frank confidence in finding himself quite right in his attack. For it was an attack. John, now that the first impact of it was over, knew that perfectly.

"Mum," said Charles, "what do you think is going to happen to me?"

She didn't know.

"I'm going to speak this afternoon before the Women's Something-or-other, peace ladies, whatever they are. They asked me. Wouldn't hear to anything but the editor of the *Voice* coming and telling 'em how the big scrap over there can be scrapped."

"Well!" said Emily. She didn't look reassuringly proud, but Charles knew how the family was fulminating — going up in smoke, he said — over America's laxity, and he didn't expect anything else.

"So I'm going," he said. "It'll be a great thing for the *Voice*. Lift the circulation tremendously. 'Bye, John. Tell your gang to let me knock some sense into their heads, when you get a chance."

Smiling to the last, he went and even whistled a little on the stairs. John saw last night was to be ignored. They were each to show a competitive unconcern. Emily

was standing by him, about to ask him if he wouldn't have the doctor now, but he shook his head, frowning; he had other matters to adjust.

"Mum," said he, "do you think I could see Jessie?"

"Of course you can see Jessie. Shall I telephone?"

This was Emily. She gave you exactly what you wanted, and didn't fuss you with offering more. John, as she knew, adored Helen, but she wasn't suggesting, "And Helen too?" to run his cup over the brim. If he asked for Jessie, Jessie alone he should have.

"If Helen comes to the 'phone don't let her think I want them both," said John, divining her reticence. "Tell her it's Jessie. It's professional. It's business."

So Emily went at once to the telephone and presently reported that Jessie was at home, and within twenty minutes Jessie herself entered the room as unconcerned as if she were used to being summoned by young men laid low. She had hurried, and her cheeks were bright. Her short fur coat was flying back disclosing the perfection of her white silk waist, and John decided incidentally that, although she wasn't within a mile of Helen, she was pretty—oh, very pretty. She slipped off the coat and sat down composedly by the bed. She didn't ask about his pain, and he saw she wasn't going to. Jessie was, he thought, a mighty good fellow. He began at once and told her about last night, about his going down to Grasslands and the disaster of his coming home. She listened in silence, but intently, and he was sure every word bit. He ended by saying he couldn't take this to his father or his mother, because nobody could guess what, in their absurd loyalty to the family tradition, they'd do. One thing they were pretty sure to do, and that was to approach Charles, the very thing that mustn't be thought

of for a moment. He couldn't tell Helen because it would upset her like the deuce and no good come of it. He could tell precisely and only Jessie, and she must swear herself black and blue to keep his confidence.

"Of course," said she thoughtfully. Her mind seemed to be off on tracks of its own. "No, it never would do to let Charles in for trouble now. You've got to give him rope. I've not much doubt he'll hang himself. Anyway, the thing is to lie low and see."

"Now this one thing has got to be done," said John. He was ignoring his pain. The effect of the little tablet was wearing off and the fiend knew and was creeping back; but he could, briefly, disregard it. He could sit above it and plan out his task which seemed to him rather a big one, a tragic one, if the first steps were really as serious as they had seemed. "We've got to get that bag out from under the bridge, and I know of just one person to do it."

Jessie looked eagerly hopeful and held her breath. But he was not going to say what she tremulously wished he might. Was hers the high emprise?

"There's just one person and that's Cross, supposing you're right about him, that is, and he's to be trusted and all that. And I've come to the conclusion he is."

"But where is he?" she asked, putting aside her impertinent feminine ambitions for the moment, because the thing you wanted badly enough could always be plunged for in the end. "We don't know where he is."

"No, but I'll bet you Helen does."

"Am I to tell Helen?"

"No, no. Just tell her I want to see Cross. Then you send him to me. Get a messenger, if you can't do it by 'phone. I don't want you mixed up in this any more

than I do Helen. I won't have it. But send Cross to me."

"I don't believe Helen would know."

"She would. Don't you remember how foolish she always was about the servants—lovely, it was—and knew where their fathers and mothers lived and sent 'em things at Christmas? And if Cross had a relation this side of the water she'd know it, and that's the clue for you to follow. I've got to have that bag."

"Of course," said Jessie, again thoughtfully. Then she giggled. "Wouldn't it be funny," she said, "if it was only the Herr Captain's hair brushes and clean hanky?"

"It isn't," said John. "It just isn't, that's all."

She got up and took her coat.

"Yes," she said, still following out her thoughts, "you could trust Cross."

"I'd bet on Cross. And particularly now Charles has turned him down. There's been some kick-up there we don't know. Charles never would have got rid of him for no cause. He's too valuable."

"If I can't find him at once," said Jessie, "shall I send you word? Or just keep on trying?"

"Keep on trying. Only it's got to be done. The weather may change, too. It's softening up, don't you see?—and if there should be a pouring rain it might start the brook, and wet the blamed thing through, and then where'd we be? Last night the bed of the stream was as dry as my hand; but you know how it comes rattling down in a big rain. You remember it, don't you?"

"Tell me where it is," said Jessie, sitting again, in spite of the impatience in his face. "Just while I button my coat. If you were going into the path from the station, how would you go?"

"You turn in to that little street where the shoe shop is, and go over a bridge, and there's a kind of a swampy place and beyond that the woods begin. My idea would be to have Cross go on to the next station, Deal's Crossing — the milk station, it's only a mile, and a train stops there twice a day — in case anybody was watching at the station itself. Then he could walk back and ask for the shoe shop, do you see? — and go by it to the swamp and the path. And I should say he'd better have a bag of his own, a good-sized grip, and slip the other bag into that, in case they're on the lookout for it. Or he could slit the thing with his knife and take out what's in it."

"Or open it! If it's hair brushes, it wouldn't be locked."

"It is locked," said John. "I tried it before I chucked it under, while I was in the woods. I thought if they were papers I could put 'em in my pocket and throw the bag away. Yes, the thing was locked. You see if Cross gets the papers out, he can chuck the bag back under the culvert. Only he must be mighty sure it is empty."

She rose. Slow as she had been, her coat was buttoned, and she found no other pretext.

"All right," said she.

"Jessie," he called. She was at the door now, but she stopped and looked back, ready, at a word, to stay. "You're a great sport," said John, rather shyly for him. "I'm awfully obliged."

## XIX

JESSIE went at once to the public telephone at the corner of the street and rang up Helen. She might not be back, she told her, before dark. It was business, an assignment. A job? Yes, truly, a job. And would Helen please promise not to go out, at least not after dark, and when Jessie came home they'd have an exciting trot together, back and forth in front of the house, and she should rather think that was enough to satisfy anybody. Then she telephoned the station, and finding there was a train shortly for Deal's Crossing, took a taxi and told her man to hurry. She had not for a moment meant to waste time hunting up Cross. And not only did she agree with John that the Herr Captain's hair brushes must be retrieved, but she was warm with the interest of this commonplace, rather humorous little errand. Inconsiderable as it was, it gained in gravity since it was to be done for the assuaging of John.

On the way down she formulated what she was to do: the simplest task, it seemed. Only she had forgotten to provide herself with means of concealing her booty after she got it, a negligible fault: for, if she once got the bag of the Herr Captain, she was quite sure of hanging to it. A sweet day, she told herself, as she sped out into the country, oh, a sweet day! The weather was softening, as John had said, and the first stages of the change were beautiful in the extreme. The air was not



of the wintry clearness it had been but yesterday. An almost impalpable thickening, a hint of blue, hung upon the marshes and softened their brown ineffably. When Jessie got out at Deal's and took the road familiarly known as the Milky Way she was in gay spirits, and while she walked the mile through swampy growth the sense of anticipation stayed with her and made her step light and her heart free. The way was easy. There, not far from the station, was the shoe shop and the beginning of low ground. She walked rapidly now and presently found the small trees thickening into an older growth and at her left, the path. There were a good many oaks in the Tracy wood and the mahogany brown leaves were whispering. Three or four clumps of white birches showed beyond a screen of hemlock, and she thought how enchanting a spot it would be in the spring. And when she had followed the gentle curves of the path for perhaps five minutes, she rounded a more abrupt bend and saw the dry bed of the alder-fringed brook and over it the stone bridge.

Jessie was enormously excited, and liked the feel of it. She was ready to whip up her enthusiasm a little more, if that might be, it made the heart beat so delightfully. At the bridge she stopped and looked about her. She meant to be very cautious, very like a seasoned agent of the force. Was the Herr Captain perhaps watching her from the woods, like a pirate over his doubloons, ready to fight for his hair brushes, presumably by scaring her to death? There was no sound except the rustling of the oaks and the whirr of the little brown birds that spend their winters capriciously winging about in flocks, settling and sweeping on again. She knelt at the side of the bridge and put in her hand. Then she got down lower to look,

There was nothing there. A few dried wisps of some water plant brushed her cheek. She gazed stupidly at the groundwork of stones embedded in the sandy earth. But she could see from one side of the space to the other, and again she told herself the bag was gone. She got up and dusted the dried grasses from her knees, and knew that the lovely brown day had darkened and the sense of anticipation dropped like a stone.

What could she do now? Should she regard the quest as ended, go back and tell John she had carried it out otherwise than he had planned and that had been the disastrous end? She walked along, hoping against certainty to find another bridge, and presently found herself at the edge of the woods and the rising ground of the orchard. Here, losing the brook, she turned about and went back, and, because she could not bear to leave the smiling day behind her, diverged at the right and went into the woods. Here things were amply beautiful; there was delight in the woods if she hadn't before her the grave task of again meeting John. At her feet were checkerberries and ground pine and she threw off her disappointment and began to gather. And while she was wandering within a small range she heard voices and stood still, giving up her green activities, to listen. She was, at this point, enormously amused. The Herr Captain, she judged, had come back for his brushes as Captain Kidd returns for buried gold. One voice was a woman's, and presently she saw them, a man and a woman, walking together in a direction parallel to the path, each with head bent, quite evidently searching, scanning every step of the ground, putting aside a branch here and there, and sometimes retracing a step to go over the ground again. The woman, we may know, was Elsa Davenport. Jessie stood

as still as the trees and watched them. The man was a sanguine fellow with a red beard and a twitching mouth. The woman — Jessie felt a woman's pang as she noted the perfection of her clothes, plain to the point of severity but in the same degree exquisite. The two spoke now and then, in tones not unnaturally low, and when they had turned again and were retracing their way, the woman stopped, threw up her head as a wild animal sniffs the air and listened. Yet Jessie was sure it was not to any sound from her, not the crackling of a twig or a breath too full. The pretty young woman, she thought — for now she had had time to decide she was either pretty or something more significant — was being warned by that super-sense mankind has of unseen presences. And the next instant Elsa moved the fraction of an inch necessary to see Jessie, looked at her and broke into laughter, an excellently considered laugh of the sort women are taught for the stage. The man started. He even jumped aside as if, Jessie thought, the laugh had been a warning of something venomous in the path. And he, too, looked at Jessie. He stood still, but the woman moved directly forward, speaking as she came. And her vibrant voice was significant, like her face.

"You've found it," she called, "and we've been hunting half an hour."

"Oh, no, I haven't," Jessie was on the point of answering stupidly, her mind full of the Herr Captain's bag. But she did stop herself in time and answered: "Found what? Something you have lost?"

Elsa came on, picking her way among roots and gnarls, and the man immovably waited.

"Why," said Elsa, "ground pine. I've been hunting and hunting and this man kindly offered to show me some.

But not a speck. You needn't wait," she called back to him. "There's a lot right here."

And while she stooped, tearing up the evergreen garlands, he seemed to vanish, he went so softly and so fast. But it was not in the direction Jessie had come. He must, she thought, be going through the orchard to the house. Then Jessie, amply burdened herself, gathered for Elsa, who talked here and there, with a pleasant ease, about the day and the fun of being out in the winter woods and the silliness of houses and the ills they entailed. Jessie was fascinated, in a way, though not attracted. But Elsa did add a distinct charm to the enterprise that had seemed to end so badly, was really ending badly, in spite of gay companionship.

"And laurel, too," said Jessie, "there, just where you were walking."

She went over to it, and stood for an instant saluting its green immortality. Then, like a whispered hint, a hand laid on her arm bidding her remember, something said to her: "Just here they were walking. It is covered with ground pine. They didn't want it after all. They were looking for something else." Whether the silent whisper had been heard by the other woman, too, at the same instant she could not guess, but Elsa called to her:

"Good-bye. I have to go this way."

And she did go, though not by the path, but through the woods, as the man had gone. Jessie stood still, her eyes following the slight figure winding in and out among the trees. She came slowly into the path, and went along the way she had come. At the station she sat on a bench outside, her green trophies on her knees, waiting for the train, and presently a car came up and the lady of the woods alighted, said a word to the chauffeur and

dismissed him. He drove away, and she crossed the platform at the front of the station within a yard of Jessie, and went in to the ticket office. She could hardly have helped seeing the solitary figure with its lapful of green. Yet she did not apparently look, she did not speak, and after a minute or two, when Jessie took the train, she saw her getting into the car in front of her. And she carried no green garlands from the wood. Jessie felt bruised and miserable. Had they seen how stupid she was and somehow taken advantage of her dulness? They had, she thought, "played it on her." But who were they and what was it they had played?

## XX

NORRIS was doing a strange thing. While the family thought of him as writing on his novel—for there was always a novel going—he was writing out the character of Charles, partly as he knew it from acquaintance, partly as he had begun to guess at it. He was one of those who, accustomed to the illuminative use of the pen, can hardly think without it, and often smiled in remembering a seamstress of his father's early days who would enter upon no sartorial problem until she had put on her thimble. Norris took the *Voice* now and read it, every word, and he was puzzled and afraid: afraid for Charles who was so mysteriously clever in getting the suffrages of the crowd. How did Charles know where to strike the underlying desires of base men, like a diviner with his rod, and how was he skilful enough to wrap his propaganda in such phrases that, as they followed, they strutted and grew wiser in their own conceit. They weren't ashamed of being detected in conspiracy against the world. They said: "Lo! here is a man who sees us as we are and the just rewards we are bent on, rewards we hardly dreamed we could have. We never knew there were such golden apples in the world as these he is going to shake down, or, if we did know it, we thought they were the spoils of greater opportunity. He promises us a new heaven and a new earth, and both we shall inherit, we, plain men who expected no more than to see the idle rich ride by to more colossal fortune." There were other sorts who believed in Charles, the pure in heart and correspondingly vague of mind,



who could swear by a word so long as it was a good word like love, justice, peace, and eat and drink the word and look up raptly to see it printed in the heavens while their feet stumbled along the disordered ways of earth. Charles, counting these two sorts of disciples, the sinner and the saint, was getting an enormous following. He was asked to speak at clubs, and though nobody had known he had any rhetorical gift, he talked of love and peace and was acceptable.

Norris read the *Voice* with a determination to clear its paths from the tangle of words and chart out its policy. He did get some definite general tendencies. Charles was continuing as he had begun. He still omitted no opportunity to call attention to America's lofty ideal of a stable peace, even though the rest of the world were cracking into chaos. He still compared the clear air of western progress with the foul winds that beat across Europe, blowing up war. He drew glowing pictures of what America could do for this same sodden Europe when, after her debauch of blood, she had to be reconstructed and admonished by her sister across the ocean. Always the implication ran, America is too noble to dip her clean hand in blood. Do not go to war. He drew an affrighted picture of the evil might of Germany. Therefore, again, since she was all but omnipotent, do not go to war. He sorrowed over England's lamentable arrogance, her tyranny on the seas, and indicated, still sorrowfully, that America could never ally herself with policies of that complexion. Therefore, so far as being her ally on the seas and in the trenches is concerned, do not go to war. Charles was, in short, putting sand in the works, and so cleverly that while he slipped it in he seemed to be oiling up and keeping the wheels going.



Now here was a man Norris had let loose on the world, and the man was not creating it anew that future generations might call it good. He was undermining it, burrowing in it, piping it with the vitriol of evil communications, and all, though thus far mysteriously, to the advancement of himself. His father thought him over and over, as if he had been a boy of ten who had got into dirty ways, and wondered what to do with him. And as he had done repeatedly, in the days of the very young Charles, he called in Emily. He went to the head of the stairs and shouted for her and she came, hurrying.

"Doing anything?" he asked and received her where he stood, took her hand and smoothed it as he led her into his room. "I mustn't bellow like that if it's going to start you up and make you scatter like a mother hen. But I have to bellow, you know, when I need you." He put her into the chair by the fire and then shut the door and took the twin chair which he drew near enough, Emily saw, to touch her hand while he should break something to her. By this she knew he was quite sentimental. He was going to tell her something that made him sorry for her.

"You're not worried?" she said, "about John? He's better this morning and fretting to get up; but it bothered me so he promised not to."

"No," said Norris, "I'm not worried about John. I'm worried about Charles."

Then he did put his hand on hers where she had left it conveniently on the arm of the chair, to save him trouble, and she knew they both had to be sorry.

"Charles, you see," said Norris, wobbling a little because he really didn't know how to begin, "Charles is behaving badly." And that sounded so sickly that he

immediately amended it. "The plain truth is, he's acting like the devil."

The soft hand under his did not stir by an involuntary quiver. He wondered if Emily knew it — knew more than he did — or how she always managed to keep her calm.

"What is he doing?" she asked, and her voice also was unmoved.

"He's running his paper — you know he bought the *Voice*?"

"Oh, yes. I knew that."

"Well, he's running it in a way to run us all into the ground, if we don't understand and discount it and see it's propaganda."

"Is it propaganda?" asked Emily.

"Yes, of the deadliest sort. Emily, Charles isn't straight. He never has been, he never will be —" She made a little murmur here and he knew it was the mother in her, passionately asserting itself, against experience and reason, to cry, he would be straight, he might. The future was his anyway, the mother heart declared.

"We've covered it up," Norris went on, inexorable even to the irresponsible spirit in him, too, that bade him let the boy alone. He'd grow out of it. Boys did grow. "We've taken every incident by itself, ever since he was little. We've said, 'Charles hasn't done the straight thing this time, but this time doesn't count.' It's like our using palliatives for John's lameness. We deaden the pain for him and keep him in bed, and that's the best we know. But if we found a heroic remedy, a thing that would cure him for good and all, why, we'd use it, wouldn't we? no matter how much it cost us, no matter what it cost him."

Here she interrupted him, but at a tangent that pulled him away from Charles. It wasn't artifice. He had

touched a spring of eager credulity and hope and she couldn't keep it down.

"Norris, sometimes I wonder — about John, you know — this young Triphammer says his doctor can see into the very tissues themselves —"

"So can the X-ray," said Norris compassionately. "But I'm talking about Charles. In the past, up to about now, Charles's being crooked didn't seem to matter much except to us — all of us, and Helen — but now he's got a following. He's a leader, Emily. He's got the pacifists and the pro-Germans and the Anglophobes and labor — oh, he's got labor. You ought to see the way he fats 'em up."

"I know," said Emily, in a low tone. "I read it."

"Do you read the *Voice*?"

"Yes."

"Well, doesn't it mean just that — what I've been telling you? Or doesn't it?"

"It seemed to me," said Emily slowly, "some of it — a good deal of it — beautiful."

"That's it. But did it seem true? Did it have any granite in it — something you could build on — or was it all hot air? Vapor, you know, pretty colored and all that?"

"I don't care about it," said Emily bravely. "It isn't what you and grandsir say, — and John. But of course Charles may see things differently."

"He does see them differently," said Norris. There was a grimness in his air and she looked at him from an appealing deprecation. "I haven't the least idea Charles cares a hang which way the country goes, or whether England and France are run over and devoured, so long as he comes out on top. He's advancing himself, don't you see? He's making the people lift him on their shoul-

ders and carry him somewhere. He's of the type that get carried because they crawl up to men's shoulders and hang on and you have to take 'em along. And the worst of it is, you take them where they like and they can make you think it's somewhere you want to go."

He had forgotten to keep that comforting hand on Emily's and she withdrew hers and clasped it upon the other in her lap. He hated his job worse than he had ever hated one. In the first place, Norris frankly disliked to talk, except in his careless, chaffing way. He was stingy of his best thoughts, though that was only because he was a lazy fellow. He liked to keep them by him as a collector keeps his gems and, when he was alone, take them out and luxuriate in the depth and shine of them. But he had resolved to meet this issue squarely, and it was John who had made him. He meant to put the family idea to the test.

"I've been thinking of this from something John said," he began, and Emily interrupted him:

"Oh, I wish John liked him better."

"Liked Charles? He likes him well enough, better'n Charles deserves. But that wasn't what I meant. Don't you know what John was saying that day — about families and how they hedge and beat the devil round the stump and get so used to whitewashing one another they're like graven images sitting up and grinning at their own unreality? No, no, I know he didn't say that, but —"

"You get carried away," said Emily. "You're so clever. That's the trouble with writing books. Say it so I can understand it, dear."

This was a slap and he stared at her before he laughed in perfect admiration of the innocence of her while she gave it.

"Hereafter," he said, "I'm going to dedicate my stuff to you. 'To my wife, my sternest critic.' No, but Emily, child, be good. See what a hole we're in. We're all in the pit together, and it looks as if it's up to you and me to drag us out. You see, you and I called Charles out of the unknown. That's the devil of it. We're responsible. We didn't know what we were getting, but we beckoned and he came. Just he came, Charles and nobody else. We invited him here. He's ours."

He was putting her through an anguished minute, and yet there was some assuaging in it, too. A great many of these minutes she had had in her life, enough to count up to a little life of their own, and she had borne them in her heart, wondering what she had done or left undone. Was it a prenatal curse that made Charles what he was, an outlaw from his birth: always repudiating the accepted laws and following base expedients of persuasion, of delicate craft that seemed to promise his reigning supreme in that kingdom he was making, where he never could see he was alone? And yet, except for other outlaws of varying degree, he was alone and out of that had sprung her sharpest agonies. And now Norris was, if not suffering the same pangs, recognizing them as something unspeakable, and she was briefly comforted. So the patient draws an easier breath when the doctor tells him his disease has been classified long ago, even if it may not be cured. Others have charted the dread way.

"I don't see," she said falteringly, "how we could have done more for Charles — or done better."

"I don't either. But whatever it was, it's been no use. He's swept on, like a disease. And now, you see, he doesn't threaten us. He threatens the country. He threatens the world."

"Oh," said Emily, plucking up heart because he leaped so far in a breath, "Charles hasn't such an influence as all that."

"Emily, do you realize how many thousand readers Charles reaches every morning? Do you realize it's like his waking up all those men and whispering to them: 'Let me tell you what I've found out since yesterday'? And if he tells them what's happening round them and what's happening on the other side of the water, and doctors it a little so their opinions are formed before they know they've got any — don't you see what power he has?"

"Yes, but there are the other papers —"

"We're not talking about the other papers. We're talking about Charles, because he's our Charles and because we conspired to get him here out of our ancestral past, wherever that was. Charles may be the cave man that started your dear old father on the track of life. He may be me somewhere back there where I sloughed off one of my skins. Anyway, he's our Charles and we've got to do something."

"You make it horrible," she said. "So big, so black! You make me feel lost —"

"Don't be lost, dear," said Norris. He took her hand from its despairing grip on the other and kept it. "You're right here and you're a game old girl. Think how game you were when you had your babies and I cried like a seal. Now, so far as I see, Charles has got to be born again and we're the ones to help him through."

"I can't see," said Emily desperately, "why it may not be he really does believe the things he's saying. A lot of other people believe them. Look at his following. You say yourself he's got a following."

"He doesn't believe the things," said Norris briefly,



"simply because he doesn't. Charles is a politician right through. He's yellow."

"Oh!" she cried, but Norris hated his job so beyond measure now that he was determined he'd finish it up.

"And when you say politician in a derogatory sense, same as I've used it against Charles, what do you mean? You mean, when the man does anything you don't accept it as an isolated act. You try to see what he's going to get by it. And you can't measure its effect until you do see."

"Oh," she cried, "I don't think that's fair."

"To call him a politician? Why not?"

"I don't think it's fair to them. Think what a lot of perfectly splendid men are in politics—"

"Well," said Norris, "then if we're going to quarrel with the word—and I own it has its other meaning—I'll change it. I'll say he is a crook."

She made no answer, but now he did feel her hand under his tighten itself and he understood. He had given her son an evil name. She would remember that.

"Now," said Norris, proceeding with his discomfiting task, "what are we going to do?"

"It never has done any good," said she, "to talk to Charles."

"Never. And we sha'n't have any better luck now. Only, are we going to stand up to it and, when the thing comes out, stand up to Charles? For it's got to come out. It's bound to."

"You talk," said Emily desperately, "as if there were something definite, something more than his saying things in the paper."

"There is," said Norris. "The amount of it is, Charles wouldn't say those things if he wasn't paid."



"Paid? Who's paying him?"

"Germany."

"Oh, no, no!" She got out of her chair and stood looking at him. She was trembling violently. "No! no!" she said again and then bit her lip to silence, because she was dazed into feeling she must go on foolishly and wildly saying no.

She turned away and went blindly toward the door, and Norris got up and followed her. He put his arm about her and held her there.

"My dear," he said, "don't take it like that. I shouldn't have told you. But he's yours, too, you know."

"Yes," said Emily, "he is mine." She said it as if she merely agreed with him; but some passionate mother spring in her had been touched, and for the instant she could have cried out that he was hers alone. She turned her wet face to him and tried to make him see she didn't blame him. Fathers, the dearest of them, couldn't know. "It's only," she said, "it's only—some of it—a surprise."

And then she slid away from his arm and hurried out, downstairs, he knew, to some hiding of her own.

Norris stood there and thought. He hated himself. He wondered if he could have done differently. Then he went up to see his father.

## XXI

GRANDSIR, exquisitely turned out by Erastus, who silently fostered his fastidiousness in personal detail, was at his table, not even pretending to use his pencil on orchards yet to be, but leaning back and regarding Erastus who stood, miserably failing to meet his eyes.

"Now, you know," grandsir was saying mildly, "I'm too old a dog to have my skeleton taken apart and put together again. This boy thinks," he continued to Norris, now coming in, "that he's got a wizard up his sleeve. (Probably hasn't a diploma to his name!) Anyhow he pulls folks apart and sticks 'em together again, and Erastus wants me to let him meddle with me."

"I only thought," began Erastus, but got no further because grandsir raised his hand and pointed.

"You're a good boy," said he, "but crazy — crazy as a loon. You go now, and don't come back till the baby's bedtime. I shall go by seven."

Erastus went sorrowfully, and grandsir turned to his son and bade him sit down.

"He's a good lad," he said. "Almost makes me cry, he's so hurt because I'm falling apart here and there. I don't think I strike him as being in any sense a valuable old gentleman. It's because he's crazy about the human body and the way it's put together."

"What is this doctor he's so gone over?" Norris inquired. "Osteopath?"

"Yes, and Bones — I don't call him Erastus except be-

fore company—I call him Bones—he thinks his doctor is God's understudy. God made and Landis patches up after Him. Norris, it's a funny thing to be old."

Norris gave him a quick, inquiring glance. Was his father really, the look said, going to break that silence which had lain over the twilight land he had been living in, these meagre years, with such dignity and unspoken acquiescence?

"Even your ears feel queer," said grandsir. "They've tightened up somehow. Your voice doesn't sound in 'em as it used to. And going downstairs—it's an adventure. I've been thinking of it for an hour. I want to go down and see John now he can't get up here, and I swear I dread it so I'm afraid."

"You look awfully fit," Norris ventured, and immediately he saw the veil of reticence renewed upon his father's eyes. He had, in his fumbling compassion, met grandsir with one of the commonplaces intended, in the family, to make things go, and grandsir had repented his impulsive candor.

"Well! well!" said he, "I dare say I shall get down sometime in the course of the forenoon. You seen John?"

"No. I've been giving Emily a bad quarter of an hour. Wish I hadn't. It's never any good. I told her Charles was going to the devil, and asked her what we could do about it."

"Charles has gone to the devil," said grandsir. "He went some time ago. What particular devil did you refer to?"

"Well, John, you know, thinks he's been bought for propaganda. Thinks he's in the pay of Germany."

Grandsir nodded, and Norris, impatient at finding him so unmoved, ended irritably:

"You don't seem surprised. Has John been at you?"

"No, it isn't John," said grandsir slowly, "it's Charles. He couldn't surprise me."

"Well, what do you know about all this?"

"Nothing, except the way he's carrying on in the *Voice*. What does John know?"

"Nothing — but the *Voice*. Oh, yes, and he thinks because Charles has bought up Brennan and Finch and Bailey and isn't using any of their stuff, he did it to keep them from placing it anywhere else. They've been red hot, you know."

"Sizzling. So's John. Do you know anything about that woman that's been trotting round with Charles?"

"No. Never saw her. Don't want to."

"Well, what about Charles anyway? What have you done? What you going to do?"

Norris was not prepared with any answer to that. At least, if he had known in advance that the question was to be put to him, he would have owned himself stumped. But as if his tongue moved in obedience to some inner witness he hadn't called and now didn't even recognize, he answered:

"Look for proof against him. And, if there is proof, doesn't that mean giving him up to justice?"

He looked, in his surprise over himself, at grandsir, to see how this was taken, and their eyes met and held. Grandsir was the first to speak.

"I see," he said. Then he offered, tentatively, "Roman father?"

"Don't chaff," said Norris quickly.

"No, no. I'm only thinking you're in for something big — and queer. For you can't question him, or you'll only put him on his guard and make him more dangerous

because more underhand. And if you're going to give him over to the law — well, I don't know."

"Father," said Norris, in a bitter outburst, "he can't do these things. I can't let him. He's my son."

"No," said grandsir, "no. But I suppose I was thinking of Emily — and Helen."

"I'm thinking of Emily, too," said Norris hotly. "Don't you suppose I'm thinking of Emily? But here's my son and he's doing his best to undermine every damned thing the few decent-minded people are standing for. And he's got that disproportionate influence everybody has who can get into print. It's horrible, father, this power of the printed word. It's criminal."

"Yes," said grandsir thoughtfully, "though it's beneficent, too, sometimes."

Norris stared before him, yet hardly conscious of what he saw.

"You're not with me," he said. "If we had the evidence here on that table, you wouldn't use it. It's because Charles belongs to us. He's our family. And the family's defensive. It's got so used to hanging together it will hang against the law."

Grandsir didn't answer him for a long minute. He sat looking down at the table where his fingers were drumming a noiseless call. Or was it a tattoo of mourning for dead hopes? He knew he had disappointed Norris profoundly. Grandsir was quite aware of his position in the family. He knew — and wondered, because he retained a mildly ironic estimate of his own value — how they looked to him for the wisdom they were doubtful of finding among themselves. Often he played up to their expectations with a didactic gravity which was as funny to him, tottering, as he believed, on the brink of his own predestined abyss, as

it was admirable to them. But he realized again to-day that they knew nothing about the intermittent paralysis of growing old. It came in waves, and every wave was higher. With the ninth wave he would be engulfed. There were weeks when his former self sat composed and did its beneficent tasks, which he was careful not to recognize at their true value as fictions to fill up the time, and then, without warning, just as the hopeful self within him had begun to wonder if there mightn't after all be an elixir, if, by taking thought, you couldn't stay the moving finger, another wave was upon him and he was scrambling breathless up the sand, alive still, but a little more clearly cognizant of perils underfoot. And this was the day after a wave. "I understand the Roman father business," he could have said. "It's magnificent. It's even better than that. It's simple decency. But it's possible at the age of fathers only, not grandfathers. As for me, I can't go with you to your sacrifice. I've had enough of looking on at tears."

Norris rose from his chair.

"Well," he said, "after all, we've nothing, as yet, to act on: nothing but the evidence of the *Voice*."

"If you see John," said grandsir, "tell him I'll come down by and by, if he likes."

But Norris didn't go in to see John. As he got to the room, a small procession was filing in, Brennan, Bailey and Finch, who had met Jessie in the street and been told, with a persuasive picturesqueness, how John was laid by the heels. That decided them on a resolution of long debate: that they would not be dropped. They would be spoken to, or they'd speak to him, even if they had sold themselves to the *Voice*, which wasn't, after all, criminal: only asinine, as the sequel proved. And if

there was a way into a thing, wasn't there also a way out? Emily had asked John if they could come up and he had hesitated a sulky minute. He had missed them tremendously. He did want them back. But this he neither hinted to Emily or himself. Yes, he said, they could come.

Bailey appeared first and made his propitiatory onslaught:

"Well, old son! Now don't talk. We don't want to hear anything about it. You needn't tell us we plumped into the soup when we took on your Charles. But don't you worry. He's got nothing on us."

"He isn't publishing you," said John. "And I'm glad of it. Serves you right."

Brennan, who had the usual flat package under his arm, laid it on the foot of the bed, untied it and took out a drawing. This he prepared to display at the indicated moment.

"You're right," he said. "He isn't publishing us. And we've struck."

"You can't strike. You're under contract to furnish him something every week."

"We're doing it," said Brennan, "and we're going to keep on doing it until he gets so mighty sick of the contract he'll be the first to tear it up. Go ahead, Finch."

Finch came up and ranged himself by Brennan. They hadn't sat down. Somehow, in their dogged, grouped persistency in explaining themselves, they were funny to John, and yet he felt a choking over them, too. They were good chaps, and he and they had had some of their prettiest sprints together.

"We're doing a series," said Finch. "Brennan does the cartoon, I do a fable and Bailey writes a pome."

"It's called," said Bailey, who had now sat down on the



corner of John's work-table and was swinging his feet, "The Man without a Country."

"Oh, rot!" said John. "Don't pinch things that have been done once. That was A Number One then. What do you want to muddle it up for now? That's never any good."

"Oh, no," said Bailey, enjoying himself. "It isn't E. E. Hale's. We've swiped the title, that's all. This is ours. Go ahead, Finch."

"It's simply," said Finch, "the story of your Charles. He's the man without a country. We've thought up all the lurid things he'd do if he thought of 'em, and strung 'em together and given him the leading rôle, doing 'em. I see him putting that into his paper. Go ahead, Brennan. Exhibit A."

Brennan set the cartoon up before John, and John looked and began to laugh, and the laugh shook him and momentarily hurt. This was Guido Reni's Aurora, and Charles was the flying figure bringing in the dawn. Nothing could have been funnier than the flying Charles, every significant line of his face knocked slightly out of plumb to make a leering Charles, a Charles whose torch belched smoke and lurid flame and went up in words, words of the most divine significance, all which Charles had lately been using in the *Voice*. The sparks from the torch fell, and tiny cities were ignited by them, and, if you looked closely, you saw the cities were marked Belgium, France, but never Germany. The second cartoon showed Charles grinning like a cave man, brutalized, unkempt, placing the bomb at a munition shop. Here John did protest, the power of it was so terrible, the accusation so tremendous.

"But see here, fellows, you're going some. He is playing tricks with the paper, but this — this —"

Bailey slid off the table and joined the two at the foot of the bed.

"Oh, but that's it," he cried. "Don't you see, we've got together all the stock things and fastened 'em on him? Make him as mad as ten devils. If we'd got any evidence, don't you see, we'd do something different. We'd give it in to the D. of J. But this is just to make him bust his b'iler and fire us. Go ahead, Brennie."

Brennan slipped in the next, and at this John did gasp and wonder. It was Charles in pilot's togs, out in a raging sea, receiving mail from a submarine. And the mail sacks were marked plainly "Propaganda."

"You know," said John, "you know—" And there he stopped. He couldn't tell them this was coming too near home, nor what he had gathered from the evidence of his own eyes that night at Grasslands. They had hit the truth square in the centre. Charles was receiving mail or secret communications of some sort. Should they be allowed to accuse him, warn him, indeed, and put him on his guard in advance of John's confirming his few facts? "See here," he said, "I don't believe I'd go into this."

"Oh, but you let us read you our stuff," said Bailey, cheerful as a bird that sings perpetual April. "Go ahead, Finch. I'll come up after the barrage."

Finch ran through his short fables explicatory of the cartoons, and then Bailey read his verse, enchanted with it himself, and breaking off after a stanza to look up like de Pachman at the piano and call:

"Get it, Tracy? Ain't it a cracker-jack?"

And John did get it all and was, he said to Finch afterward, bowled over by the cleverness of it, so that he ventured not a word further to recall them to safer sanities. Finch's fables bit like vitriol and seared with fire. Bail-

ey's verse went on, wave after wave, in a riotous abandon. His metres were absurd but persuasive, and his rhymes were lawless — commander and propaganda, periscope and merry hope — stuff ground out to fit a fleeting moment and yet ground in a mill of such perfect action that you couldn't stop to have the produce packed in cartons but scooped it up in your hands, as it ran from the hopper, and choked yourself with it, laughing as you gorged. When they had finished, they stood looking at John, like dogs that had done their tricks. Their faces were a little like dog faces then, with the lifted eyebrow of inquiry, almost, you would have said, the cocked ear of hopeful doubt.

"Oh, get along with you," said John. "You know what kind of stuff it is. It's clever as the devil. I can't say anything to you. Use it and be hanged."

So they packed up the fruits of their excellent invention and went away, after John had proposed they should meet in Bailey's room as soon as he was out again, and look the landscape over. And presently Erastus came in with a letter. It had been brought by messenger. It was from Jessie and was brief. She told him she had herself gone to Grasslands and had found nothing. She didn't report the man and woman who had also been hunting, and not for ground pine. Jessie couldn't quite bring herself to that, in advance of knowing whether John was suffering intolerably. She thought she might defer it until she knew. John lay holding the letter crushed in his hand, surprised, sorry, more disappointed than he could have believed. But the surprise was a part of that. It hadn't occurred to him as possible the bag might not be there. The experience of a whole boyhood bore him out in the certainty that a thing put into the old hidey-hole simply waited until you came for it, or until the rain fell and the

brook rose and carried it away, usually in pulp. And there had been no rain. At that moment he moved, impatient of his state, and it occurred to him, as it comes to the ear when a continuous maddening noise has ceased, that the pain had gone. And then he saw that Erastus had slipped in and was noiselessly placing his shoes before a chair, as if he expected John to sit there and put them on.

"Bones," said John, who had lost no time in adopting grandsir's name for him, "I'm going to get up. The devilish thing has stopped."

"Yes," said Bones, unmoved. With his accomplished career in view when he would occupy a position as good as the best, he never said "sir." "I thought maybe. You've been laughing."

John had thrown off the clothes and set his foot gingerly to the floor. He was slow in trusting it. But he left it there and turned to stare at Erastus.

"Laughing? What's that got to do with it?"

Bones spoke respectfully yet with firmness:

"It snapped in. I could tell by the look of your face. Now if you'd let me make an appointment with Doctor Landis —"

## XXII

WHEN Jessie, perplexed over the outcome of her afternoon at Grasslands, got home with a fragrant disorder of ground pine in her hand, she found Helen at the door of the apartment, waiting for her, and saw at once that she was a thought outside her usual calm. She received Jessie in a flutter of welcome, exclaimed over the wood trophies and began to dispose them about the rooms, and when Jessie came back, after taking off her things, fell on her with more solicitude, to persuade her to the fire. Jessie said she wasn't cold; the afternoon warmth had lasted even after the sun went down. But Helen, regardless of that, offered her fire again and assured her dinner would be ready presently; and now Jessie did look at her with the arched eyebrow of quizzical protest.

"Very nice, Nell," she said, "very flattering. But unexpected! Just why do I find myself so popular?"

Helen laughed a little, though she kept on looking wistful.

"I can't help it," she said. "I worried."

"Why, I telephoned you."

"I know it, but you didn't say where you were going. Where did you go?"

"Secrets," said Jessie, with a studied ease. "Into the country, that's all. I'm going to write it up, the woods in winter, that kind of thing."

"Who sent you? Couldn't you have taken me? And you found these lovely things. I believe if I went into the woods I should get down and roll."

"You shall, the next pleasant day. But you needn't worry about me when I'm overdue. You simply mustn't. I've gone about alone for ages, you know, and as for Over There —"

Helen stopped her, and was very sweet but decisive. It wasn't good for Jessie to be perpetually thinking about Over There. She must relax from the ardor of that terrible task and get the benefit of absence. Then, when the moment came, they would both go, and there would be no more rest for either of them.

They went out to dinner, and had it cosily, and then came back to the flickering after-glow of the unnecessary fire, and Jessie was about to get out the work-table when Helen stopped her.

"Not to-night," she said. "I want to talk."

They took low chairs by the fire, and Helen threw on a couple of sticks. It might respond ungraciously by making them too hot, but she had to have its company in her task.

"Jess," she said, "want to turn out the lights?"

Jessie did it. Something, she knew, was coming. She went back to her chair, folded her hands and sat still, her eyes on the fire. She had never ceased wishing Helen would tell her some of the things that might make their queer life simpler, the things about Charles. And now she was sure it was coming and she was afraid lest they should be harder to deal with than she thought.

"I've seen, within a day or two," said Helen, "that you'd got to understand something about my leaving him. I've dragged you home from France —"

"No," said Jessie, in a hurry to reassure her. "You never dreamt of my coming. Maybe you didn't really want me — at first. I came, that's all."



"I do want you," said Helen. "I want you awfully. But I don't intend to let you in for things you aren't prepared for. Now — Charles had been doing things he shouldn't, things he couldn't tell me. And when I found them out, I did things I couldn't tell him."

Jessie turned and, in the half light, sat staring at her. For that instant, she did not go beyond the first circle of suspicion. When there is marital division, you look for diverted love, diverted by whom, toward whom? Two tears ran down her cheeks, big splashing drops she disregarded, in her woeful stare at Helen, who now looked up at her from the hand she had been absently contemplating, where her wedding ring shone securely.

"Why, you little dear," she said, "you think I mean — what do you think I mean? That he danced away from me with somebody else, and then I danced away from him? Heavens, Jess! there are other kinds of things that come between people."

Jessie couldn't speak. And she could hardly bear it, she thought, if she was to be told anything tawdry had come within measurable distance of touching Helen.

"Charles," Helen went on, her voice hardened in the measure of her difficulty in forcing it into this confession, "has been doing horrible things. He's been a traitor."

Jessie was completely surprised.

"How could he be?" she asked. "We're not at war."

"Oh, I don't know whether it's what you call treason," said Helen, in a wearied impatience, as if she herself had tried to place it accurately and failed. "But he's been doing secret things to help Germany. It may not be treason, exactly. As you say, we're not at war. But he's been doing them."

"What things, Helen? What sort of things?"



"Well, some of them were connected with propaganda. There were secret meetings."

"Where?"

"At our house — his house."

She was not making a very clear story of it, and realized it, and caught herself back to the beginning as she had many times imagined herself telling it.

"The first that happened was that he fitted up the billiard room for what he called a study. The billiard table was taken out, and another big one put in, a sort of library table, and a safe, with a bookcase in front of it. And I discovered, after a while, that he didn't want me up there. You know we began by telling each other — well, pretty much everything. At least I thought it was everything."

"Awful spoons you were," said Jessie frankly. "I was mad as hops when I found you let him read my letters."

"One day, when he was gone, I went up there, and I found the door locked. I don't know what I wanted. To see the room, I guess. I was always prowling round. I loved the house, you know. And when he came home I laughed at him and he was touchy — he'd never been that, to me — and he told me it was all connected with business, and I shouldn't understand and mustn't bother him, and I wasn't to tell even the family about the bookcase and the safe. It was a perfectly commonplace thing, he said, for a man to have a safe in his house, and he put the bookcase there not to spoil the look of the room. I wasn't hurt; I only thought it was funny, and I made up my mind I'd do something ridiculous to let him see I could get into rooms if I liked. I'd leave something there — like a play, you know. There's always a glove or a lady's handkerchief to prove things. I knew I could get the key.

Charles is an awfully careless person. He can't help leaving things round."

"Did anybody else go up there? anybody but him?"

"Yes, five or six men, at least once, sometimes twice a week. They came in in perfect silence. Charles himself would let them in. The nights they were to come, he'd give Cross an evening off."

"Did you see them?"

"No. He asked me to stay in the library and shut the door. He laughed about that, and said they had a big business deal on and he'd given his word nobody should know who they were, not even I. He said the deal's going through depended absolutely on secrecy. Otherwise the newspapers might get hold of it. One of the men, he said, was an old stager who'd suffered so much from publicity that he wondered he didn't wear a veil."

"And you shut yourself up? you didn't look?"

"Of course I didn't look. It seemed to me perfectly reasonable. Interesting, too, funny — the man with a veil. Besides, I didn't care. Do you remember Charles and I used to telegraph each other in cipher?"

"Don't I!" said Jessie. "I never saw telegrams of that length. You let me read them once or twice, and I was furious because they were all about Indian pudding and sweet pickle and I don't know what, and I was perfectly sure there was something underneath. But the day I cried you told me it was a cipher, and hugged me, and you never plagued me with them again. I used to be awfully jealous, Nell."

"I was a beast," said Helen. "There's nothing so selfish as a girl in love. Well, I wrote a letter to Charles, in cipher. It was in rhyme, just one page of it. And it jeered at him for thinking he could have a Bluebeard's

cave and lock a woman out. And I kept it where I could lay my hand on it in an instant and waited for a chance to get hold of the key. And one day he came home dead tired and threw his clothes every which way in his room, as he always did when he was in a hurry, and went in to have a bath. And I slipped into his room and took his keys and flew up to the billiard room. And then things began to be queer. They've been queer ever since."

She stopped a moment, as if at a threshold she dreaded tremendously to cross, and Jessie held her breath, much afraid she would not go on. But she did go on.

"I unlocked the door and went in. The room struck me with a kind of chill — though it was warm — and a sense of gloom. Yet it wasn't a gloomy room. He had bought some handsome rugs and really beautiful hangings. And one interesting thing about it was that, though I had furnished the rest of the house as I liked and he'd always praised my taste a lot, he hadn't even asked my opinion about this. I was to be kept out, in every sense. But maybe the reason I thought it gloomy was that it was so dusty — dust on the table, on the floor, windows thick with it; and it came over me that even the servants hadn't been allowed to go in. I'd set a cleaning day for the room and reminded him to be sure to let Cross have the key; but apparently he never had. The big table had chairs about it, and at one end was a writing-pad and pen and ink and some papers scattered about. And one thing more, the only one that meant anything to me and made me laugh to myself and think Charles had expected to play some sort of joke on me, the kind I was playing on him — a little worn book."

"What sort of a book?"

Again Helen had not wanted to go on.

"It was the book that had the key of our cipher written out fully, and he used to carry it in his pocket because, though he's so terribly clever in most things, he's slow about others. I could read the cipher like lightning, but he had to pick it out. Well, that, I thought, would be a better joke than mine. I'd slip my verses inside the code and let him find them there. And I went round the table to do it, and found a sheet of paper lying on the pad. It was a letter in typewriting—I forgot to say there was a typewriter in the room—and the letter was in cipher—not about sweet pickles, as you said, but other things just as queer—and it gave definite instructions for blowing up a munitions factory, and told what the men were to have and how the money was to be divided among the gang."

"I don't believe it," said Jessie loudly.

She had said she hated Charles, but this was beyond all credulity. He was a brute, but he was a man of decencies of birth and affiliation, and a man whose hand she had actually touched.

Helen wasted no time over her disclaimers.

"That," she said, "was what I've called in my mind the turning point. That was the minute when I began to be treacherous myself. Yes, I've been as underhand as he has, in another way. Of course if I'd been really playing fair, I shouldn't have read the letter. But don't you know the feeling you have toward the person you've trusted absolutely, the person you're—you're one with? They tell you there's something you mustn't see, and you don't look, but you know there's no real reason why you shouldn't. I can't explain. I'm not excusing it. I did read the letter. And everything was different. It's like being hit on the head. You are benumbed. I suppose I

stood there a minute. It seemed a long time — forever. Then something came awake in me, and told me the letter mustn't go. He could write another, of course, but that letter mustn't go. So I took it up and crumpled it in my hand, and got out of the room and shut the door. And I put the keys back before he had finished his bath."

"What did you do with the letter? burn it?"

"Not then. Afterward I did. I wrote another, to warn the munitions plant."

"Anonymous?"

"Yes. I told them the date fixed, and that if no attempt was made then they were not to think it had been given up."

"Did you typewrite it?"

"No. I didn't know how, even if I'd had a machine. I did it in my printing hand. You know I do two or three kinds of print."

"What did you say to Charles? how did you meet, I mean?"

"We didn't meet until night. I scrawled a note to him and told him I'd got to go out and couldn't wait to see him after his bath. Hoped he'd try for a nap. And that night at dinner I fancy I was much as usual. Either I was or he was too busy with his own affairs to notice."

"Do you suppose he missed the letter?"

"He must have. But he knows he's careless. He may have written another — there were two mistakes in this — and thought he'd destroyed it. The other may have gone."

"And didn't you say anything, Helen? not anything? You acted as if things were just the same?"

Here was an implied reproach and Helen could have owned it merited.

"I didn't say anything. Not then. And I tried to be as nearly the same as I could. I did tell him I was rather fagged and not quite up to things. But at the end of three days he came down from the billiard room with a sealed letter in his hand and into my room where I was dressing for dinner. We were going out. He stopped and talked to me, the letter in his hand, and I saw it hadn't been addressed. I didn't know whether to tell him or not. I thought, if he were sure of mailing it without the address, it would be all right. It was probably something hideous and unlawful, and it simply wouldn't get there. But he did see it, just as he was going into his own room, and said, "Damn!" and hesitated a minute and glanced at my little desk, and then, I could see, remembered he wanted the address typewritten and that he was in a hurry. Anyway he said to me, 'Address this, will you, in your printing hand?' So I took the letter and sat down at my desk and he gave me the address, calling it out from his room: for I told him he'd got to hurry."

"Who was it to?"

"McClancy and Hull, Chicago. It was the name the first letter was written to. And I'd gathered from the first that the firm name was a blind. It was really one man."

"And you addressed it."

"Yes. And I took it downstairs, with two letters of my own, and told Cross to post them at once. And I didn't go back upstairs till I'd watched him from the window and seen him drop them into the box."

"You addressed it," said Jessie, "without a word?"

"I addressed it. But not to McClancy and Hull. I addressed it to myself. And next morning it was delivered to me in the mail."



Jessie sat staring at her, though now Helen's face was but a white oval in the dusk, for the fire had gone out.

"What if he'd asked to see it?"

"He did ask. I went back upstairs and he called, 'Have you done it?' I said 'Yes.' And he said, 'Printing hand? Bring it here and let's look at it.' And I said, 'Oh, I've given it to Cross with mine.' And he said, 'O the devil!' And then, 'Well, all right.'"

"And it came in the morning?"

"Yes."

"And it all went off as smooth as silk?"

"Perfectly. I took care to be in the hall when the letters came. I carried mine upstairs to my room and left them in a drawer while I went down to breakfast."

"Was he at breakfast?"

"Yes. I poured his coffee and we talked about my running down to Grasslands to spend a week. I could see he wanted me to go."

"How'd you feel?" Jessie pursued. "Now, Helen, how'd you really feel?"

"Excited," said Helen, without hesitation. "I didn't feel anything else — not a thing about deceiving him. I don't believe you do until you begin to get punished. You haven't time, in the first place, you're so busy covering up your tracks. And it does something to you, too. I can't explain it. If you've always told the truth and kept the rules and then you begin suddenly to lie and smash everything to pieces, it's as if something else had been required of you, something you'd never thought you could do. And you're different. I suppose it's the way any criminal feels. He's outside the law, but he's somewhere, just the same. There's standing ground under his feet."

But though Jessie was curious about this, too, she



wasn't going to lose time over it now for fear Helen should cease her story, and that, it seemed to her, she could not bear.

"What was in the letter?" she pursued. "You opened it?"

"I could hardly wait. I was afraid, too. I knew it would confirm the other, and I'd got to have it over, know the worst. Yet I thought if it was the worst, it ought to kill me. I ran upstairs the minute he had gone and opened it. And it was the same sort of instructions in the same cipher to blow up another factory. There was a good deal of detail. I won't go into that. Most of it I didn't understand."

"What did you do?"

"I burned the letter. But I didn't dare write the firm. The date set was too near. I went down to the North Station and telegraphed the munitions plant. I tried to make up something the operator wouldn't understand. It was, 'Next chapter ready about blowing up the works. Plot can be defeated by extra vigilance.'"

## XXIII

“WHAT then?” Jessie breathed. “What d’ you do then?”

“I got panic. I was afraid — this came on me suddenly — afraid the operator would guess what I meant and call a policeman. I was so panicky I thought maybe I wasn’t going to be able to walk away from the window. But I was. And I took a carriage to the South Station and a train a little way out, and came back to town by trolley. But I was in terror all the way, and for days I expected a ring at the door and the police asking for me.”

“Was the plant blown up?”

“No. I kept watching for it in the papers. It never came.”

“And you didn’t speak to Charles, and you didn’t tell anybody — the family, I mean?”

“No. I didn’t speak to Charles. Not then. I hadn’t made up my mind how to do it; there didn’t seem to be any way that wouldn’t do more harm than good, put him on his guard, you know, without actually stopping it. And I couldn’t go to the family. John would probably kill him, and grandsir — dear grandsir! — he’d die of shame.”

“But Helen,” said Jessie, “haven’t you realized that if you didn’t do anything it would all go on? Plants would keep on being blown up and — why, it seems as if you’d be responsible.”

“Yes, I thought of that finally,” said Helen. “I was

pretty stupid. But I did what I could, there. About the time of this last letter — it was the next day, in fact — a foreign letter came for him. He often had them. I'd never bothered about them. His business hadn't interested me. But this had a Dutch postmark. I took it upstairs and steamed it over my alcohol lamp."

"Steamed it? What for?"

"Why, to open it."

"How'd you know how?"

"Oh, I've always known," said Helen. "I've often done it when I've changed my mind about a letter and been too stingy to lose the stamp. Well, it was in English, but it was dated Berlin. And it praised him for something he'd been doing and told him the New York bank he was to look to for money. And it gave him three names of Germans naturalized in this country whose orders he was to take."

"Did you destroy that?"

"Yes, and I wrote another, as short as I could make it, in the same hand and put it in the same envelope and sealed it up again and left it on the hall table. And he found it there."

"What'd you say?"

"I told him he was to do nothing whatever, no matter what any German-American agent told him, until he heard from Berlin again."

"By George!" said Jessie. "I don't know whether I think you're a dead game sport or whether you scare me blue. And this was in plain English, not cipher?"

"Yes, it was in cipher. I forgot to say that."

"How could you read it? It wasn't yours."

"Yes, it was his old cipher and mine. Queer wasn't it, to find it coming from Berlin? I fancied Charles had

wanted it used because, as I told you, he's never been very clever about that sort of thing and he'd try to keep on using the one he'd learned."

"About the letter," said Jessie. "I'll tell you where you'll fall down there. The stationery. There'll be a watermark. There always is, and somebody'll see it's forged."

"No," said Helen, "I wrote it on some paper I brought away from the Kaiserhof, in Berlin. I did that two or three times when we were abroad: didn't have time to write a letter home, and took along a sheet of the hotel paper to date it from the place I was talking about. I thought anybody, even an official person, might easily go into a hotel and send a note from there, even such an important one."

"But you left him," said Jessie. "You didn't stay to keep your eye on him. How do you know what's gone on since?"

"About my going away —" said Helen, and then stopped. She was now profoundly troubled, though she had thought the problem of her own responsibility and her guilt in avoiding it over and over, until it was now only a wearisome question, not settled, never likely to be.

"The fact is," she went on, "I've never been able to think whether I ought to have gone or not. I simply don't know. But this was what I did. I made up my mind I'd got to have it out with him. I took it in the daytime, one day after lunch. I told him I'd found out something dreadful — about him. And the minute I said it, I saw it was all true."

"But you knew it was true."

"Oh, I know I did. But don't you see? I suppose in the bottom of my mind was a hope he'd somehow explain.

He'd laugh and tell me how it all was, and I should wake up and know it was a dream. Those dreams, you know, where the one you love doesn't love you any more, and you wake and he's there and you put out your hand and touch his."

"And is he the one you love most now?" Jessie wanted to ask. "Do you still?"

But that she knew she must not ask.

"He looked," Helen went on, and paused for a simile, "he looked like death. Not angry. I've seen him angry, though not with me — then. But he looked somehow done for. And then he said,— yes, I've got to tell you this, too — he said: 'Who told you about her?' "

"About whom?"

"I didn't know. I was as puzzled as you are now, and I sat and looked at him. And he said, 'If anybody's told you about Mrs. Davenport, it's a lie. And I did go to New York with her, but it was on business, and if anybody has told you ——' and he stopped there, and I sat and looked at him."

"But, good gracious!" Jessie said. "Heaven knows I'm not anxious to stand up for Charles; but men and women are trotting about together everywhere now — war work and all. The world's changed, Helen. We are in business up to the hilt. And to say a man can't — Oh, I'm afraid you've been foolish. I'm afraid you've done what you'll wish you hadn't."

"I should have thought that, too," said Helen, "but then he got angry. And he said things — about her. And one thing — yes, I will tell you that — a degraded thing, 'What you don't know doesn't hurt you.' And that I'd been wrong to find it out and had myself to thank. And that he'd never loved me better than at that minute."

"Just what did he mean by that?"

"I suppose," said Helen quietly, "he meant that if I'd accept the situation he'd be very grateful to me and we could go on pleasantly compromising — and being compromised."

"Don't," said Jessie involuntarily. "You sound so hard."

"Do I? well I don't feel very soft. I hardened at that minute. I could feel myself doing it. I froze, and I haven't got thawed out since. You must remember, Jess, I'm not the same person I was before things happened to Charles and me. I've opened letters and spied on my husband and cheated and lied. Oh, no, I'm not the same person at all."

"O dearest," said Jessie, "what could you have done but what you did?"

"I don't know what I could have done. The things came on me, one after another, and I met them as they came. I don't know what I've done to help or hinder, whether I've done right or wrong. And I don't know what it's all done to me."

"But," Jessie asserted, "you don't care about him any more. I see that."

Helen winced. She had travelled far since the days when love seemed to her an ecstasy, a recognized madness of loyalty, a light playing upon that responsive creature and making him divinely hers. She didn't know now whether she still believed there could ever be that sort of creature, so transfigured. She did know that a hard, heroic fibre in her had been ready to respond to marriage as she had found it, if only an honorable relation could have been sustained. After the first, she hadn't demanded rose leaves and rainbows. She had learned that wasn't

marriage. Marriage was a substantial compact where you were to stand as the man's best friend, his partner in the big business of life. Your happiness was negligible: what you had ignorantly, out of the bewilderment of youth, named happiness. The belief in that had been the conspiracy of all the flutes and birds of dawn, calling to lure you out of your isolation into the terrible work of carrying on the world. Well, that was all right. She was up to the big challenge, if only — and then she looked at Jessie with a quick, intent scrutiny, trying to see her as she was, a woman moulded a little by hard work and tremendously by the appetite for life that is made for work, and wondered how far it was well to thrust on her the secrets of destiny which might well have been intended by the sibyls of fate for Helen to keep in her own hands, muse on, decide upon. After all, they were her secrets. Mightn't it be the only decency to let Jessie, unwarned that romance could fade into insecurity like this, face her own life, the stronger for being unprepared, and perhaps encounter no such mystery? But Jessie was looking at her through the dusk, repeating inexorably:

“You don't care about him.”

And here Helen could only fumble.

“I shouldn't have left him for that.”

“You wouldn't?” Jessie demanded, in her confident young voice. “I would. Live with a man you don't care about? That's degrading.”

It was degrading, Helen knew, put as an abstract issue, and only to be decided by the heart in one way. But you didn't make actual decisions in an instant of mental realization, the clear-cut decisive no that shuts the door upon married fealty. Before you shut the door, you have looked about carefully into all the corners of the house and



decided whether it can be made livable. If a man isn't the man you thought him, you have still perhaps the hope that there is to be built up between you some working basis of life together which will contribute more to life in general than your rushing out of the house and banging the door.

"I mean," she said, "if I had changed and he hadn't, or if he had changed and not —"

"You mean," said Jessie, "you could have stood his getting tired of you, but you couldn't stand Mrs. Davenport."

"I suppose I mean just that."

Now something came back to Jessie and made her catch her breath in a new, sudden shock of amazement.

"Why," said she, "I'd forgotten the German business. This thing knocked it out of my head. You began to talk to him about that and he thought you meant Mrs. Davenport and gave himself away. And didn't you ever talk about it at all?"

"Never. I left the house and went to a hotel and later to New York and then you came home. And here we are."

"And Charles doesn't know he's been found out?"

"No."

"But, Helen," said Jessie, "it's pretty serious. Because he's going on with it. Of course he is, now there's nobody to hinder. And isn't it up to you —"

"I know," said Helen. "It is, and if I don't speak I'm guilty, just as he is. That's what grandsir said about the United States, you know: that by not going into the war she's guilty, with Germany, of the millions of dead. I thought of myself when he said that. I thought, Charles is a traitor and if I don't give him up, I'm a traitor, too."

Jessie thought of the bag and her flippant suggestion

about the Herr Captain's hair brushes, and was humble. John had been right. But she couldn't stop to pull out that thread from the tangled web of Helen's misery.

"Seems as if I've got to know," she said, "just why you stopped where you did. There was the awful proof in your hands and you just locked it up and said nothing. I suppose it was because it was Charles."

"Yes," said Helen, "I suppose it was."

"Then you do care about him."

The blood came into Helen's face. She felt it there and was glad the dusk was between them and Jessie could not see it and read into it a story that might or might not be true. It flooded her to suffusion, and under the fatal surge of it she seemed to herself drowned in shame. She kept her eyes fixed on Jessie's though she could not see how steadily they dwelt on her with their inquiring innocence; she dared not relinquish her bravado. But she had to answer that last question.

"How can I tell you," she said, "whether I've stopped caring about him? How can I know myself? In one way he's only a strange man I've known — so well I can't know him any more. But a good deal is lived through in five years. If you've married a man, Jess, he's — different to you."

"Well," said Jessie, "are you going to save him at the expense of hundreds of other people?"

"Am I trying to save him?" asked Helen passionately. "I don't know. Or am I trying to save the family the disgrace of it? I don't know. I only know I'm in a net and I can't break out."

"Tell them," said Jessie. "Tell grandsir first."

"I went over there to do it, two days ago, and he was worse than usual, and when I was on the stairs I heard him

groan just once. ‘O Lord!’ he said. It was awful. And when I went in, he was as nice and as funny as ever, and said his legs were behaving like the deuce, but he shouldn’t know what to do without them. And I couldn’t tell him about Charles. How could I? ”

“Well, anyway you’ve told me, and you’re an old dear. It’s pretty bad — bad as it can be — but I can stand it better, now I know.”

“I had to tell you,” said Helen, “because, the other night, I saw him.”

“Not here? ”

“No, in the street.”

“The night you came home frightened? ”

“Yes. And he wants me to go back to him. He won’t spare any pains to get me back. And I thought if things got to be — queer — or anything strange happened, you ought to have something to go on, be prepared. I know, of course, it’s horrible for you — a girl — ”

“Get that right out of your mind,” said Jessie quietly. “This talk of preserving the ignorance of girls is simply rot. I’ve learned more about life in the last two years than our mothers ever knew, and since the world is made that way it’s the best thing that could happen. You can’t blow a nice iridescent bubble round me, for I sha’n’t stay in it, that’s all. And I’ve worked in France.”

## XXIV

IF the Tracy family was in a state of judicial activity over Charles, hauling him up before the bar of their individual minds and debating what should be done with him, he also was on edge. John's appearance at Grasslands had been a blow straight from the shoulder of malicious fate, and his walking off with the Herr Captain's bag as provocative as it was alarming. The Herr Captain had sailed, according to schedule. There were imperative reasons. He had been provided with duplicates of the lost papers, though certain important signatures had to be forgone, for lack of time. But Charles, seeing with his mind's eye the incriminating documents fluttering over the world like leaves from the book of destiny, his destiny which was so terribly isolated because he had wilfully cut it off from the fortunes of mankind, was wild with anxiety to recover them. It had been almost beyond his power of will to keep himself in hand when John lay in bed, that day, under his glance. But this self-control of the perfect diplomat he had long ago set himself to attain, was, he believed, as exquisite a weapon as man has learned to forge. Never, in crucial tests, to betray his anger, his uneasiness, his fear, unless, in some last instance, he had to intimidate, to crush: that was his formula of mastery. He had tested it over and over again. It often disarmed, and it always bewildered. He was having abundant scope now for seeing it in action. The boys, Brennan, Finch and Bailey, were trying him like fiends, or malevolent sprites told off by the grave gods

of circumstance for his undoing. But he was meeting them imperturbably. The instant he detected their antagonism in action, he was ready for them, urbane, impenetrable, either so thick-skinned or so elusive that they could not, he was sure, have guessed whether any of their shots told. But those things cost, especially to a man of his extremely delicate poise, incident to quick rages, who, when the world denied him, had one unvarying impulse: to kick back at it.

On the evening of the day Jessie had seen Mrs. Davenport at Grasslands, he went to Elsa's, having previously telephoned to ask if she were alone. He found her in a gold-colored dress like a mist of sunset, her cheeks burnt red. The day in the country had soaked her in sun and freedom. She carried the air of it in her breath and the light of it in her eyes. Charles nodded, put away his hat and stick and took the chair she indicated with an intimate cosiness of welcome. However tempestuously he longed to touch that glowing cheek, he knew better than to snatch. A kiss was something to be waited for. She sat down opposite him and smiled.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked, for the moment almost resentful of her beauties and the merciless appeal they carried. He thought she might have seen how undone he was over his anxieties.

"Dear me!" said Elsa, apostrophizing the parrot, who also remarked, "Dear me! dear me!" and continued, "What a fuss!"

"I'd like ——" said Charles and stopped, remembering, though late, that Elsa was not one of the family and he couldn't be entirely himself with her.

The parrot, with a ready, gleeful optimism, completed the sentence for him: "I'd like to wring that bird's neck."

Elsa, in a fit of laughter, got up and opened the cage door, and invited the creature, who sidled toward her with a complication of steps.

"Don't let the devilish thing bite you," Charles recommended.

But Elsa still offered her hand, and the parrot perched on it and was carried out of the room, chuckling on the way: "O law! law! what a fuss."

When she came back, Charles did unwillingly smile.

"It occurs to me," he said, "he's heard that remark a good many times."

"Wringing his neck?" said Elsa. "Oh, yes, over and over. Polly's never had many friends among mine."

Charles felt the purpose that had brought him here break suddenly, as if his jealousy shivered it with a fist.

"Elsa," said he, "this room must have heard a good many strange things since you've been in it."

"Oh, yes," she said. She had brought out her knitting and unrolled the yarn. But first she spread a fine white handkerchief in her lap. She was exquisitely careful of her clothes. "Enough to hang us all."

"Enough to hang you, if I got hold of them. I don't mean state secrets. I mean yours. Who came here before I began to come?"

She knit out her needle and then looked up at him. The flush of the air and the sun was going out of her cheeks and she knew it by the coldness at her heart, the drop to the old dead feeling that nothing was worth all this frenzy of planning and holding on. But she did gallantly smile at him.

"I wish," she said, "you were a nice boy and wanted to make me comfy. No, sit still and let me tell you what I did down there."

"Any luck?"

He took out his cigarette case and his hand was trembling.

"No, not about the bag. It wasn't there."

"There? you didn't go all over the woods."

"Yes, we did pretty much."

"We?"

"Herr Adler helped me."

"Has he been out of the house, running the risk of being seen?"

"Now wait," said Elsa, "and let me tell you the whole story. I got there at ten. I gave him the money and made him write down the directions. He isn't to take a scrap of paper of any sort except the two French letters thanking him for what he sent for relief work. And he is to wait, no matter how long, till the car comes."

"You're sure the letters were all right?"

"Sure. I can do that foreign hand perfectly. Then I told him I was going into the woods to look for the bag your little brother threw away, and the poor man was so sick of the house I let him come, too."

"Well," said Charles, "I suppose you didn't see anybody."

"Not a soul," said Elsa. It would be quite impossible, she knew, to tell him the whole story, in the mood he was in to-night. If she had seen Jessie and spoken to her, then Jessie had seen Adler, and a new trail of uncertainty was started. And Adler, glad enough to do it, since he'd no business out of the house, had promised to be silent.

"He hadn't shaved his beard?"

"No, oh no. Of course he hasn't shaved it. Wasn't he there to let it grow?"

"Well, he doesn't seem to have been any too keen about



obeying orders. You think he understands he's to stay with the Maine colony, if we can get him down there,— anyway till he's taken off? ”

“ Sure of it. Have you seen your brother? ”

“ Yes, I've seen him. He's in bed. Hurt his leg or back or something, that night, and good enough for him.”

“ What did you say to him? ”

“ Nothing. Oh, yes, I did. I said it was a shame about his lameness, or something of the sort.”

“ You didn't ask him what the dickens he'd done with the bag? ”

“ No.”

“ Ignored it.”

“ Yes.”

“ You thought it was better? ”

“ I've set a man to watch him, as soon as he goes out of the house,” said Charles, frowning. He didn't like the idea of that, though he had done it. After all, John was the family. It was a part of his arrogance to keep the family on impregnable foundations even while he battered at them. “ If he has it, he won't get away with it without our knowing it.”

“ Are you worried? ” she ventured.

“ Worried as the devil,” he owned. “ It's a pretty serious business.”

“ Sometimes I think there wasn't any bag,” said Elsa. “ It's ridiculous. The captain sets it down in the hall, and hears John on the stairs. And when he turns round the bag has gone and John has gone, and you conclude they've gone together.”

“ Naturally,” said Charles, with a grim conciseness. “ We've every reason to believe so.”

“And then that ridiculous professor sees John at the station ——”

“Why ridiculous?”

“Oh, he’s so precisely like the stage German, thick-headed, and sentimental, like a lady poetess —”

“Sentimental?”

“Oh, no, no, not over me, Othello. But all of a mush, don’t you know? A kind of temperamental fat. And soft! Singing melting songs and swilling beer — oh, I loathe the creatures.”

“Softly, my lady,” said Charles, still grimly. “Don’t forget you’re in up to your neck, if you do loathe ’em, and you’re spending their money rather freely.”

“He sees John at the station, and John is without a bag; but at the same time hasn’t any books, which does seem to indicate he didn’t come down for them, after all. And there’s no bag in the path, no bag in the woods as near the path as he’d have had time to go, no bag anywhere. Charles, I believe he didn’t take it out of the house. Don’t you know that settle in the hall? I saw it to-day. Doesn’t the seat lift up? Didn’t he lift it like lightning and chuck the thing in there?”

“I looked there myself,” said Charles. “There were two books under it, but not his Dramatists. No. He hid it somewhere in the woods. And he couldn’t go down to get it himself, and if it isn’t there now he sent somebody else.”

“Oh,” said Elsa softly, “so he did. That was it then, was it?”

“And the most likely person for him to send was one of those three fools of his I’ve got working for me on the *Voice*, though I’ve reason to know he threw them over because he was out with them for doing it.”

"Yes," said Elsa. "I see. They would have been likely persons."

While they talked she was knitting fast, without intermission. Whatever she did was done in that quick complete way, and her knitting for the Belgians, she told Charles, with a demure smile, was her one great interest.

"Now," said Charles suddenly, "play to me."

She put down her work and, after a look at him, her brows earnest, her eyes thoughtful, went to the piano. The look asked if he wanted anything, if he could possibly be more comfortable than he was, and Charles understood it so and liked it.

"Yes," he said, answering it while she was settling herself on the piano-chair, "there's one thing. You could come over here and kiss me."

She had turned slightly to hear, but she only gave a little gay smile and tossed the kiss from her finger-tips. And then she did begin. Elsa had had the early part of her life abroad. She went there to study the piano, and she had meant to come dutifully back to teach. But she had not come, and the trustee of her small moneys commended her for staying over there where she could live well on an income that would hardly have bought her chiffons at home. In a sober trip on the regulation routes of travel, he went to see her in Germany, and he was astonished to find she was not living cheaply at all. How did she manage it, he asked her, and she told him she proved to have rather a genius for getting along. And she liked the German ways? and the German people? No, Elsa said, without hesitation, she hated the German people. They were pigs. But she was very comfortable, and she should come home again and make a start sometime. And in 1913 she did come and went into journalism.

Her music was the unplumbed part of her. Whether it disclosed a self ordinarily hidden, whether it merely woke every fibre in her to an intensity of physical life, who could say? But Elsa, playing, was like a golden ball, tossed from hand to hand of the Muses, in bright summer air. It was, this game of the Muses with her, of a brilliancy that transcended mere technique. Charles hardly knew he loved her until he heard her play. He craved music, craved it like a drug. It was the emotional luxury that quickened his sensibilities, though all he could say of it was that he liked it because it helped him think. Sometimes he was hardly conscious of it, as it went thrilling over his head, like thunderous waves in a storm while he sat in the quiet of his sea palace underneath, in the scheming which was his nearest approach to creative power. But it was not only Elsa's playing he craved. It was the change the playing made in her. When she had finished, she was burned red with the fire of life, taut as a bow, and her little cynicisms and evasions were gone. To-night she began with Debussy, but he interrupted her after an uneasy interval.

"Stop playing that devilish stuff," he called to her. "It's like rain into a tin pan."

And then she played Wagner to him — and perhaps it was only out of perversity that she had not begun with it — and Charles gave himself up to the monstrous pagan individualism and let it sweep him on and on, knowing she was being swept with him and that it would take her to that boundary where she let herself loose, like a bacchante on the hills. Elsa knew it, too. She was half wearied of the boundary, half abhorrent of it, but she went on recklessly riding her bare-backed horse of savagery to leap it at last and speed up the burning slope. The evening

waned and she stopped playing and called again over her shoulder:

“More?” He did not answer and she left the piano and went to him and knelt beside him, her cheek on his. “Asleep?” she asked, and still he did not answer, but put his arms about her and held her there. And when he turned to meet her lips, he found she was crying, a sudden splash of tears that wet his face.

“Good God!” he said, and released her, to sit up and draw her up beside him. “You’re crying.”

It was the most disconcerting thing that had ever happened in his space of knowing her. She was hard as a frozen world with a heart of fire, and the fire itself was not beneficent, like the blaze on the hearth. It would burn you to the bone, and the piquing delight of it was to see how near you could come to being burned and yet escape. And here she was crying like any other woman, sickened over little fears and hurts. But he was not to be called on for his arts of comforting, of which he had a rich variety. She slipped away from him and went to the window and stood there looking down at the lights and swallowing her strange grief. Charles got up and went to her and put his arm about her, with some certainty of being rebuffed. But, to his amazement, she turned to him and stood there leaning on him.

“What was it?” he asked her tenderly. “What is it, dear?”

She could not tell. She was a little fagged perhaps, the woman’s modern equivalent for the old headache. But the bitterness of her soul was rising as she spoke. She could taste it in her mouth. The feel of the country air was with her, not only on her cheeks but in her mind, and the brave clear look in Jessie’s face hurt her like an accu-

sation. She was not so much tired of tortuous ways and tawdry alliances as of the certainty that she was committed to them. She had chosen to live in this house of life, and now the door was closed on her and she not only failed to see herself going bravely out into the cold clear air, but she knew the air itself was too bracing for her. A moment like this had not come for years. It might not come again for years, and as she stood there leaning against the man whose heart — the physical heart of him — was beating for her, she hoped, with a sick revulsion, it might never come again. And he was making himself very comforting.

“I’ll be good to you, dear,” he said to her more than once. “I’ll be good to you.”

When Charles went away from the house, in that dull interval of the night when human vitality is low, he saw, in the quick glance he cast up and down the street, a man standing near the curb. Charles stopped, putting on a glove and at the same time gazing at him squarely. He made a queer figure there under the light, and his having chosen that particular spot seemed to indicate his willingness to be seen: a slender figure of more than medium height, in a cape, not a coat, and with a pointed beard. He wore spectacles, and he was looking, not at Charles, but at the house. Charles, after another glance, went on, forbidding himself to look back, but he was vaguely disquieted by the position of the man, his stare at the house, the queerness of his clothes and especially his hat. It was an impossible hat, and woke some vague, teasing recollection. Where had he seen that hat? As he went on, deciding he might permit himself a backward glance, at least at the corner, he saw a man advancing, met him under the next street lamp, glanced at him and stopped



with a sense of shock. For it was the same man, the same beard, the same cloak, the impossible hat. How had he come there, walking leisurely up the street? He couldn't have gone by on the other side, however lightly he might have run, for Charles himself was hurrying. This time Charles did pause, with a word on the tip of his tongue, but the other, not looking at him, quickened his pace and passed. And Charles before turning the corner, looked back, and the street was empty. The figure had disappeared. Charles was not a man to be unreasonably alarmed, but he was a man to be angry if circumstances mocked at him. And all the conditions of his life were strange just now. He was running with a crowd of devoted criminals — devoted to a fatherland which was the big parent criminal — and he was never surprised at finding they were watched nor that he in turn might be. If anything looked queer, these were times for understanding exactly what the queerness meant. While he was debating the present riddle, and almost concluding his eyes had played him false, he got to his own house, and there under the light, not ten feet from his door, stood the same man, cloak, pointed beard and impossible hat. And now Charles did stop, perhaps a dozen paces from him, and said emphatically:

“Well, I'll be damned!”

The stranger must have heard the challenging voice, though he gave no sign of hearing. He moved away; but Charles walked after him, and was aware that the other quickened his steps and lengthened his stride until he was practically on the run. Suddenly he wheeled, ran back to him with an incredible lightness, touched him on the arm, said “Tag!” in a high, thin voice and ran on, ran wildly, Charles thought, as he stood stupidly watching him. And



he continued to run with unabated speed, until, two blocks at least up the street, he must have turned a corner, for he disappeared.

Charles went up his own steps, took out his key and let himself in. And now he knew where he had seen that impossible hat. It was on the stage. An Irishman had worn it, in some old-fashioned play of a conventional type. But what the deuce did this man mean by wearing it here?

## XXV

THAT Charles had been actually shaken by the vision of his absurd pursuer, showed him chiefly that he was, as he would have said "jumpy," not by any means fit. And though he had asked his father for the use of Grasslands because he was not sleeping well, he hadn't actually thought anything about the quality of his sleeping. But now, his attention called to himself, he found he was scarcely sleeping at all. He had too many irons in the fire not to find himself worn in tending them. His mysterious follower he had no difficulty in placing. By that last fantastic action the fellow had placed himself. He was crazy, that was all, a madman. And the chances were that he would exercise his fantastic activities elsewhere until he was scooped up and taken off to the retreat from which he had escaped.

But there Charles found himself mistaken. When he came out of his house next morning there was the fellow on the opposite side of the street, standing still and looking across at the house, precisely as he had stood in front of Elsa's house the night before. It was a bright day and he was easily recognizable from the outline of his eccentric clothes. Charles most literally could not believe his eyes, but he made straight across the street to confirm them, and the instant he stepped down from the curb the fellow, with the ease and buoyancy of last night, skipped lightly away, skipped literally, for he would take

a run of a few steps and then break into a fantastic hop or two. But he covered ground amazingly, and Charles, walking like a decently athletic citizen, fell behind inevitably. Should he break into a run? Two or three well set up men like himself were walking down town, and he saw them turn, one after another, and look back at the fantastic figure dancing past. None of them were men he knew, and he couldn't quite stop them to compare impressions of the mountebank who, in spite of their casual wonder, seemed of more importance to him than anybody. He kept on at his own rapid pace which was, after all, ineffectual, for the fellow, putting on speed, rounded a corner and was lost. Then Charles turned about and continued his way down town; but he did, in spite of himself, stop more than once to look behind him. The rest of the adventure was, he concluded afterward, when he had reached his office and passed the blonde guardian at the telephone, to the seclusion of his own den, incredible. For as he neared an alley on Washington Street, the figure bounded out, touched him on the arm, said "Tag!" and vanished into a department store. And Charles's luck was not with him, for there was no policeman in sight and though passers-by must have seen, only two or three turned to look, and one man laughed out, with a sudden burst like a yelp, as if he were too astonished to manage a tone of voice. It was absurd, but, as he went up the stairs, Charles did feel a crawling of the spine. There was nothing alarming about the matter; it was simply queer. Yet he was living so near the line of demarcation between things ordinary and the dangers attendant on a man outside the law, that the merely queer bore, even by daylight, a disproportioned significance. He could not afford to pass it by, though he could not, unless unseen,

stop to investigate it. His lifelong policy had been to offend no man, to call no attention to his own grievances, to preserve an unbroken benevolence toward all. As he passed through the outer room the blonde-haired chate-laine looked up with her best smile and waited for the good-morning he accorded her with an ornamental fringe of solicitude about the temperature of the room. Then, having assured himself of her comfort, he gave orders that no one should be admitted until Brennan, Finch and Bailey had come and gone and went on to his room, leaving her in an upper heaven of renewed devotion.

He found his room of the right temperature, and took off his coat with a feeling of relief at having attained a seclusion secure from damned lunatics. And as he turned to his chair, there on the desk, in an elaborate scrolled frame, was the photograph of the lunatic, confronting him. Charles for a moment stood stiff as a dog, pointing, before he took the thing up to regard it closely. So impossible had the whole business seemed that he felt a mild surprise in finding the framed picture palpable to the touch. He stood and looked at it: a spectacled, much lined face with a pointed beard under the shade of the absurd hat. The whole thing was faithful to his vision. The cloak was there, the long thin legs encased in trousers not unlike the trousers of the present date. But the upper half of the creature was queer beyond expression, and actually rather alarming. For he was scowling fearfully, and in one hand he held a pistol so enormous, so palpably of the past, that Charles would never have known what period to give it. Suddenly he woke to the impudence of somebody within his own walls, strode to the door and pounced upon her of the blonde thatch. Not such the perfection of a gentleman who had passed her five minutes since, after

that memorable solicitude about temperature and the accessibility of her desk to a draft. Charles looked threatening and not to be withstood. He was all employer now, the employer who means business and nothing else. He spoke:

“Who put this on my desk?”

She looked from his altered face to the picture in his hand, and it would have been impossible to doubt the sincerity of her surprise.

“For goodness sake!” said she. “Isn’t that fierce?”

“Who,” Charles repeated, “put that on my desk?”

She sobered, telling herself inwardly it was up to her.

“Honest, Mr. Tracy,” she said, “I don’t know.”

“Have you been in my room this morning?”

“No, Mr. Tracy. Freddie came in here with the mail and I asked him if he’d dusted and he said he had. I suppose I ought to have gone in, but there was a lot of things left over from last night, and I just didn’t.”

“Call up Fred.”

Fred was the boy, and he came, indifferently cheerful, for Charles’s benevolence had been stretched to include him. But his unenquiring face at once took on the reticence of caution learned in offices where favor is found to be capricious, and he stood frowning a little in his effort to meet the situation; but when Charles put his question he answered readily enough. Yes, he’d seen the picture. It was there when he went in to dust. Noticed it because it was so funny. No, sir, he didn’t put it on the desk. Didn’t touch it. Never touched the desk. Told not to. No, sir, didn’t know a thing about it. So he was dismissed, and while Charles stood there, absently regarding the chatelaine, but really wondering what the deuce the whole thing meant, Bailey appeared and Charles, greeting him

curtly, at once took him into the inner room. He set the picture down again on his desk, because there seemed nothing else to do with it, and asked Bailey abruptly, really to cover the absurdity of his having the thing in his hand:

"What should you call that?"

Bailey was in fine form, pink, smiling, radiating good cheer.

"That?" he said. "The piccy? Funny devil. What's he up to?"

"I mean," said Charles, floundering, "where'd you place him? What's his period?"

"What is he, anyway?" Bailey inquired, with a cheerful interest. "Fancy dress? amateur theatricals? or a lunatic out on a bum?"

"That's it," said Charles, shutting his lips on his own foolish sense of the importance of the thing. "Fancy dress."

He dismissed the lunatic for the moment, and took his chair.

"Sit down, Bailey," said he. "Where are the others?"

Bailey sat, and continued to emanate radiance.

"They couldn't come," he said. "Infernally busy, both of 'em. I'm the representative."

"I don't like that," said Charles. "I wanted you all together."

"Well, you see," said Bailey, "they've both got some corking ideas, this morning, and you couldn't pry 'em out of their holes. Now my head was as empty as a bag." Charles glanced at him suspiciously, the word had come to mean so much. But Bailey was free from any hidden intent. "I thought you and I could have a powwow, and then to-night, when they've worked off steam, I could pass over the whole thing to them."

"Well," said Charles, "the amount of it is, something's the matter and I don't know exactly how to put it."

"Oh, come," said Bailey, "you not know! You're the lucidest thing out. Fire away."

"The fact is," said Charles, hesitating with a true sense of the value of the pause, "there's a lot of propaganda going on."

"German?" inquired Bailey, with innocence. "Pro-German?" He was always cutting in with things calculated to draw Charles's keenest interrogation and with a countenance so blank, so innocent of guile, there was nothing for the inquisitor to do but look away again.

"No," said Charles, "not pro-German. But anti-American, if I may put it so: a propaganda that militates against America's best interests, ignoring her traditions, you know, pushing her into war."

"Oh," said Bailey lightly, "pushing us into war!"

"Yes. There is evidently an organized campaign. Fliers are scattered in all conceivable places. Stuff is sent in to papers. I know the firm that prints it and I've even been down there and put a question or two. But they won't give away the game. In fact, the fellow I saw simply wouldn't say anything: stood there and grinned."

"Grinned!" said Bailey. "What a fool thing to do." He grinned himself broadly, for Charles was, at the moment, not looking at him. His eyes were bent on the tips of his beautiful fingers, of which he was justly proud. "But," Bailey ventured, "it may be un-American and immoral and all that, but I don't see there's anything you can do about it."

"The queerest part of it I haven't gone into," said Charles. "The cleverest of the stuff is precisely like



what you and Finch used to do before you signed on with me. And it has been suggested to me that you are doing it."

"It has?" responded Bailey, in a curious voice, light of cadence and yet, it might be thought, perversely threatening. "Well, what do you think about it?"

"I?" said Charles, in an outburst of generous ardor, "I don't have to think. I know. I know I am, by the terms of our agreement, entitled to your entire output."

"Yes," said Bailey. "Right you are."

"But," said Charles, "it's devilish uncomfortable, all the same, to have the thing rammed down my throat a dozen times a day. This is what the fellows say: 'I thought you'd got Finch and Bailey. But I see they're doing a lot on their own.'"

"You could down 'em best by using our stuff," said Bailey lightly. "I only suggest, you know."

"My dear boy, I'm going to, as soon as the public mind is ready for it. You're hot stuff, you know, you fellows. But it's the deuce and all to see your work — Finch's fables, your verse — cropping up every week in those impudent fliers they're sending out."

"Who?"

"I tell you I don't know. All I know is it shows your hand, only it's better."

"Better," cried Bailey, off his guard. "No, I'll be hanged if it's better."

Charles, smiling a little, saw his trap had snapped something. They weren't in it, after all, or Bailey would never have been so piqued. Bailey, too, instantly felt himself grazed. He became at once courteous, even ceremonious.

"I can only say, Mr. Tracy," he said, "that we have

kept strictly to our agreement. I have, and I can answer for Brennan and Finch. And if there is anything in an implied good faith, anything more than the letter of the bond, I think we should have cause to be better satisfied if you had done us the honor of using the stuff you bought. I'm afraid I must run along. Can I see the clock from here?" He got up, and went to the window. "By George!" he cried, "there's our friend now."

"What friend?" inquired Charles absently. He was wondering whether Bailey had anything to tell him and how he could get at it. Bailey, in spite of his verse, was, he believed, a simple soul, too childish in his attack on realities to illuminate them by any of the lightning insight of his rhymes.

"That Johnnie in the picture, cloak, hat and all. Pistol? I don't see the pistol. No, I s'pose he wouldn't rig up in that — be arrested if he did. Though in the picture you couldn't call it a concealed weapon, now could you?"

Charles wheeled round to the window, got up, and looked down. There he was on the opposite side of the street, immovable, staring at the window of the *Voice*. Bailey seemed electrified by the eccentricity of the event.

"I'm going to run him down," said he. "Watch me."

He plunged out of the room, pell mell, and Charles, standing at the window, presently saw the figure below start, turn, step out into the street and dash away. And Bailey, light of leg, was dashing after him. The crowd turned to look, and then went on again, and Charles could see that some were smiling. He stood there thinking with interest that although they seemed about the same height and suppleness, he'd bet on Bailey, when he was aware that the chatelaine had opened the door and advanced a pace.

"Mr. Tracy," said she, "I've thought what it is. It's that Harvard club. It's the Dickey. A stunt, you know."

His brow cleared.

"Why, yes," said he, "of course it is. Why didn't I think of that?"

In about twenty minutes his telephone rang and he found Bailey at the line.

"See here," said Bailey, dramatically panting, "I'm done with that Johnnie. What do you think he did? He led me a chase up to the Common and down the Beacon mall and ran over every bench on the way. And at the foot of Beacon Street he jumped into a taxi and was off. And he stood up and waved his hat to me."

Charles laughed.

"That's all right," he said. "It's the Dickey."

"Don't you believe it," said Bailey. "That's no Dickey. It's something else that begins with a D."

And when Charles went home that night and was tagged from a doorway on Washington Street by a swiftly moving figure in the cloak and hat, saw the same figure waving to him from a slow-moving taxi near the Athenæum, a vehicle that at once put on speed and disappeared down Somerset Street, and when, nearly at his own door, he saw the same figure descending his steps, he did not think it was the Dickey. But he would give it one more day to be the Dickey before he also sprinted and made a serious business of running it down. So he walked along at a good pace, wondering if a sudden burst would catch the fellow, when the figure paused, seemed suddenly to become aware of him, threw him a kiss from both hands and ran lightly up the street. And if it was the Dickey, thought Charles, why was he the one selected for its pranks?

## XXVI

JOHN, now on his feet, telephoned Jessie and asked her to go to walk. Would she mind being at the foot of her stairs in ten minutes because he wasn't quite fit again and didn't trust himself to come up? He went limping out, not noticing the man across the street who seemed equally not to notice him, but did, as John walked away, lounge indifferently after, and he found Jessie at her steps, a sweet person in her fur jacket and audacious little hat, and, he could see with half an eye, looking anxious. At that he frowned. What was she anxious about? Was she going to take up the family cry and tell him he ought to be in bed? But Jessie made no delicate feints over his imprudence nor did she congratulate him on recovery. With the admirable sense that was Jessie, she had resolved thenceforth neither to commiserate him on his misfortune nor ignore it. Though indeed it had got to be recognized, turned out for, like a hole in the road, even though somebody had put up a sign-board. But there wasn't going to be any false delicacy about a thing which wasn't a disgrace, only a heavy handicap for gallant youth.

"I don't want to walk," she said at once, conceding this much of diplomacy to his weakness, "but I've got lots to say. Let's go to the Athenæum, into one of those upper galleries. There's a room nobody's ever in, and if somebody is we can go away again."

He was very willing, and they walked slowly up the hill,

Jessie making the pace. She began at once her task of confession.

"I didn't tell you all there was about my going to Grasslands."

"You didn't?" demanded John. "Why didn't you?"

"Because," said Jessie, "you were having such an awful time."

"If that isn't like a girl!"

He stopped a moment, pretending he wanted to look at her and censure her the more brusquely, but really because he felt a misery of pain. That was one of his tricks. He would often stop to laugh or fulminate, and no companion ever guessed it was because the leg stopped of itself. But Jessie knew. She faced him, and laughed delightfully.

"Let's stand right here," she said, "and fight it out. I won't stir till I've had my say. The fact is, what I didn't tell you had nothing whatever to do with the matter in hand. At least, not very much."

There, at the end, she had perceptibly weakened. He was ready to go on and she saw it and made the move.

"Well," said John impatiently, "what was it? what didn't you tell me?"

"Oh, dear!" she said unwillingly, debating whether he could bear to lose his temper best in the open or in the Athenæum where he would have to conform to sacred stillnesses. "After I had looked for the bag and found it wasn't there, I saw a woman and a man."

"Where?"

"In the woods."

"What doing?"

"Looking for something. Searching."

"Near you?"

"Yes. I was pulling up ground pine, and the woman saw me and she called out that that's what she was looking for."

"Oh!" said John. "Very likely. There's a lot of it there. Shall we go in?"

They were at the Athenæum door, and they did go in and took the elevator up to one of those spaces which were, as Jessie had predicted, empty.

"Come into this alcove," said she, "where we can see if anybody comes. Then we can hush up. I don't suppose anybody's any real right to talk, even up here. I know it makes me mad as fury."

They found chairs by the window, and she went on at once and finished her tale of the man and the woman hunting for ground pine.

"And," she said, at the end, "they weren't hunting for it. That's the joke."

"How do you know they weren't?"

"Because I went over where they'd been, and there was a lot right there at their feet."

John felt his tepid interest suddenly boiling.

"How'd they look?" he asked, and she described Elsa, while he stared at her in a fixed intensity. "Yes," said he quietly, when she had finished — and a very good description it was — "you needn't say any more. I've got her. That's Mrs. Davenport."

"Mrs. Davenport! Do you know about her?"

"Don't you know?"

This he was glad to ask. He had been wondering how much Helen told her. Nothing vital, he fancied, for she only said:

"Whoever she is, she knows how to wear her clothes."

"Well! well!" he spurred her, "the man? Who was he?"

"I don't know who he was. But he had a red beard and a wry face and big ears. They were so big his hat sat on them."

"Now, who," said John to himself, "who the mischief could that be? For he was there that night. Only I didn't think of him then as any more important than the rest."

"And," said Jessie, "when I found they weren't looking for ground pine, I began to believe it wasn't the Herr Captain's hair brushes only in the bag. For they were hunting, just as I'd been. They'd been hunting for the bag."

They sat in silence a moment, John staring out of the window and Jessie taking the opportunity of stealing a look at him and very much liking his face when it was still.

"Yes," he said, "they were hunting for the bag. That's something, in a way, because it proves that, whoever's got it, it wasn't Charles."

"You thought you heard somebody behind you in the woods. Mustn't it have been he?"

"Probably. But I thought then whoever it was was one of the set I saw in the house. If it wasn't, who was it?"

Then they sat and looked at each other. Jessie had a theory or two of the practical thing to do now, but she was timid before him. It disturbed her exceedingly sometimes to think how hard she tried to please him and how difficult it was.

"I can tell you one thing," she said. "The bag is gone from where you put it. And if anybody took it away from there and hid it in the woods, the two I saw are pretty sure to have found it, if it was to be found. Anyway, if it was in that section where I was."



"The woods don't run far," said John. "There aren't more than two acres. The mowing's beyond."

"I should advise your sending somebody down," said Jessie. "Me, for preference."

"Not on your life," said he. "You'd no business to go in the first place."

"Well, there are your three nice friends. Why not send one of them? Mr. Bailey! he's terribly clever."

"Yes," said John, thoughtfully, "Bailey'd go in a minute. And if Charles found it out and picked a quarrel with him, so much the better."

"Shall we go along?" she asked. "I've told all I've got to tell. Besides we can't talk any more. Here's a lady novelist."

So they went down again, and when they stepped out into the street John halted and Jessie glanced at him. Little fine lines had come about his eyes and mouth. She knew what called them there and instantly felt herself on her own ground and not afraid of him.

"I'll leave you here," she said, "after you've got your carriage."

John turned to her with a sudden imploring that showed her how he looked when he was a little boy, and the knowledge moved her as mother hearts are moved. She signalled to a cab opposite and it swung out and drew up for them.

"Wait one minute," said she. "I shall have to run back for something. You get in and wait." She disappeared into the Athenæum, returning shortly. "I wanted to look up an address. It's that Landis you and grand-sir are always making fun of. I thought, now the horrid thing's come on again, you might like to go there at once. Shall I tell the man?"

She hadn't really any hope, for all her bravado. But

John was answering quietly, holding himself still, speaking the more gently because his nerves were screaming:

“Yes, you tell him, please.”

That afternoon he came back to his father's house looking, his mother thought, as if he had been through some strange, exalting trial. It was the look of pain that leaves the body burned to the ash of life, but, as a fire, has gone.

“Don't speak, mum,” he said to her, at once. “Don't talk about it. But I've been to Bones's doctor and he laid his hand on me — isn't that the way it goes? — and — mother, it's exquisite not to ache.”

Emily stood with her hands shut at her sides. She did not dare touch him. In the aloofness of his relief there was something majestic: he was like one who had been through such terrible fields of anguish that he knew what others did not and must be regarded as we might think of the dead, if they returned.

“John,” said she then, “are you cured?”

It broke the spell between them.

“Lord, no, mother,” he said. “I've got to go to him twice a week — for the rest of my life for all I know. But cured? I'm not in pain. And he says — well, I won't tell you what he says. You're such a duckie about hoping you'd hope too much.”

This was all they said, and John was amused to think, days after, that he hadn't said anything to Bones at all. But he'd catch Bones watching him, as one would critically watch a horse, he thought, to see what his action was, and whether he'd better be sent straight back to the vet. Bones, too, looked exaltedly happy, and John pondered over him a good deal, beginning to see how rich a thing it is to be gifted with a passion for the perfecting of the ways of life.

That night when John, rather tired with it all, but still not in pain, went early to his room, he stopped at his father's door. There was one thing out of the confusion of facts he had about Charles that he intended to give over into his father's hands. Norris, his forehead fretted by the perplexity of his task, looked up from the paper where he thought he was still writing out the study of Charles, though really he was only pondering miserably. He woke straight up from it to John's presence, for Emily had told him about John; he couldn't quite believe it — and yet, he thought, if it gave the boy a moment's hope!

"Glad you came, John," he said. "I wanted to see you and tell you — your mother says —" There, struck by the tired pallor of the boy's face he stopped, reflecting that fathers weren't always supposed to butt in headlong on confidences intended perhaps for mothers alone.

"I wanted to say," said John awkwardly, since he couldn't tell all he knew, "that Charles isn't alone at Grasslands."

"How'd you know he was at Grasslands at all?" asked his father, looking at him sharply. Perhaps he was reaching out at some community of confidence between his son and himself, about this other son who evaded him actually and also in that inner life he had tried to set forth on paper. Could John help him understand?

"I went down there," said John. "I had an errand. And I found Charles there. He had some fellows with him."

"Yes," said his father. "He's told me about it. The thing happened quite naturally. The men wanted to talk with him about a better cable service, and they followed him down there. He hadn't meant to call a business meeting, but he had to, I could quite see."

"Oh!" said John. "Well, I can, too."

He went on to his room where he expected Bailey, summoned by messenger as soon as he got home. And by the time he had his fire going—the Tracys so loved fires that they were perpetually turning off central heat to build a little blaze—Bailey came, fresh as the morning and so vivid in his zest of life that you'd have called him the morning itself. The two long-legged fellows stretched themselves in chairs and John at once gave Bailey a working version of what he wanted. He and Charles, he told Bailey, were manœuvring for possession of a bag. At present neither of them had it and it had got to be found. John had had it temporarily and hidden it under the bridge at Grasslands; and then he told how it hadn't stayed under the bridge, and how worse than useless it was for him to look for it, first because he couldn't trust his leg just now and again because, it being an issue between him and Charles, Charles mustn't know he was looking. The woods near the bridge had got to be searched. Would Bailey undertake the quest? And would he also undertake to find out who was staying at Grasslands, or whether there was anybody? Here was John's key. He might go in, if he liked. And couldn't he telephone Charles and make an appointment with him for Brennan or Finch to talk over their stuff, and, if Charles made it, seize that time to fly down to Grasslands?

"Sure," said Bailey. "The rape of the bag! But who do you think it is staying in the house?"

"I don't know."

"And what'll I do if I find 'em?"

"Nothing. Report to me."

"If the bag wasn't where you left it, what makes you think it's anywhere else in the woods?"

“Because somebody working for Charles — that I know — was seen searching the woods. And I assume — you’ve got to assume something — one of his gang hid it and forgot where.”

Bailey nodded. He was “on” he assured John, though how far on such a slippery plane of conjecture John couldn’t guess. Then Bailey looked suddenly serious and remarked:

“Your Charles is a queer Dick.”

“Yes,” said John dryly. “You’re on there. What now?”

“Well, you know our Man without a Country series? We’ve been piling it in on him, hot as we could turn it out, every instalment worse than the last, deadly insults every one of ’em: Charles Tracy betraying his country in all the stock ways. I thought before this we should have had a row to be heard down the harbor and out at sea — wire-lessly to Deutschland. And of course we hoped he’d turn us out, neck and crop. But what do you think? He accepts the work. He smiles urbanely, says, ‘Bully! ripping!’ and pats us on the back.”

John nodded.

“Yes,” said he, “that’s Charles. He won’t quarrel with you. He’ll ignore everything you want him to see, and if the time comes when he doesn’t need you he’ll quietly slice your heads off.”

“Need us!” echoed Bailey. “He can’t be in any great need of stuff he puts an extinguisher on, like a bedroom candle.”

“Of course,” said John, “that’s what he wanted you for. He knew he couldn’t get out of you the sort of work he’d use, but he could stop your activities everywhere else.”

This, deeply as John distrusted his brother, bitterly as he felt his renegade tactics, it hurt him to say. The family again, he thought angrily. Because Charles was the family he shrank, out of the fierce pride of it all, to admit even a friend to his disgrace. John still failed to understand families.

Bailey, grown grave, sat for a moment looking at the fire.

"I suppose," he said, at last, "that's about it. He did us, that's all. But he thinks he's got one on us. What do you s'pose he sent for me for? sent for us all three, but I went, to represent the firm. He's seen the fliers going out from somewhere in Boston and recognized the style. And he charges Finch and me with writing the things in defiance of our contracts."

"Oh," said John, "I didn't think of that."

"I told him, not guilty," said Bailey. "I guess he believed me. But I didn't tell him there was only one man clever enough to pull it off. Though John, old boy, you'll bust yourself doing your work and ours too."

"What else was left me," John inquired bluntly, "when you got into this mess that simply means your work is cancelled, done, down and out for at least three years, which may be the period of the war?"

Bailey sat still, staring into the fire. He didn't look now as if he saw young April in every bush.

"Well," he said, "we made our throw and we lost. Sometimes I think I'll repudiate the contract, tear the thing up and tell him I'm on my own again."

"No," said John viciously, "what is written is written. No scraps of paper in ours. Besides, you're not likely to scare him into tearing up the duplicates."

Bailey was sunken in gloom, at once irradiated.

"Nothing's final," he swaggered. "It wouldn't be beyond belief for us to make him scrap us, in fear of worse. Meantime, old boy —"

"Meantime," said John, "I'll keep on copying you simply because you're the cleverest things I know. Rotten luck I can't copy Brennan, too. But you and Finch I can, and by the time you come back to the open market again you'll find I've got it away from you."

He met Bailey's grin with a like one of his own, both boyish, ardent, full of braggadocio and enormous admiration for the youngness of it all.



## XXVII

LATE the next afternoon Bailey went down to Grasslands. He had not thought it well to consult John about the time of going, having his own ideas of that and seeing no necessity for inviting argument. If he was to find out who was in the house, it could be done better after dark. He couldn't imagine himself walking up to it by daylight, overlooked from the windows, perhaps letting himself in with John's key and stumbling at once over the inmates he had come down to spot. And how could he, whatever the time of day, find out who was there without a good amount of dangerous audacity? That evening there was, at least, no danger of Charles's appearing. Finch had seen to that. He had asked for an appointment to talk over the policy of the *Voice* — an impudence Charles himself couldn't help staring at, because he knew, by this time, the three had no smallest idea of following anything but their own mad will — and Charles had set the hour immediately after dinner. Bailey knew he could spend the night at the workmen's boarding-house which called itself a tavern and begin his search of the woods in the early morning. So he set out, with a moderate degree of assurance, on the whole rather anticipatory and pleased. Leaving the station, he took the wood path which he knew perfectly from other days not so long ago, down there with John. But you would not, if you had followed him, have recognised Bailey when he emerged from the path and crossed the orchard to the house. You would have seen a

slim man in a cloak with a queer hat and spectacles and a pointed beard. And the reason he stopped in the woods and donned the disguise he had brought along in his bag, was that he simply couldn't resist one more move in the foolish game he had invented for the bewilderment of Charles.

Suppose he came on somebody at the house, conspirator or caretaker; that person would meet the amazing total of him in his strange habiliments, which would be of no remote consequence, except as it might be reported afterward. He and his fellows had got to speed up on Charles, who was to be followed and confronted and haunted until his nerve was broken or he got irresponsibly "mad": foolish, but having for the gang the merit of being the best they could devise. They had the agreeable certainty that there were unmentionable events crowding the background of Charles's life, and that, in consequence, he couldn't bear watching. Also, if he were watched persistently, you would inevitably find out things valuable enough to be traded for other things of value. Bailey had stopped at the little bridge and thrust under his bag. He would come back for it after he had done his errand at the house, and he thought what a shame it was he had nothing insulting to leave there for good, in case it occurred to Charles also that it had been the old hidey-hole. He crossed the orchard, passed the garage, which was dark, and approached the house, where he noted a light at the back and also from an upper window. The front hall also showed light in its traceried fan over the door; and he went up the steps, opened the door with John's key and stepped in. The house was entirely still. Neither of the front rooms was lighted, and he stood a moment grinning at his own fantastic figure in the great mirror at

the left. He went upstairs, opened the door of John's room, found it dark and closed the door again. There he halted a moment, hearing a step in the front room at the right of the hall, and suddenly he started, with a genuine shiver, for a tenor voice broke into a snatch of song. The house was so still that he found himself immediately credulous of everything sinister and strange. Even the song sounded to him baleful in its sweetness and he had to stand there and conquer his distrust of the spot he had perhaps foolishly penetrated. In an instant more he remembered this was to be gay adventure and tiptoed along the corridor, grimacing dramatically, tapped at the door and threw it open. A man stood facing him, hands in his pockets, evidently having just risen from the table where his book still lay; his pipe, tobacco jar and glass with bottle and siphon, bore testimony to a leisure hour. The man, Bailey saw through his spectacles, had red, disordered hair, a red beard and a twisted mouth. He had also enormous ears, apparent even through the thatch of hair. In the instant of the door's opening, he made a spring to one side, every line in his face intensifying, in a queer way, so that he seemed all wry apprehension; immediately he controlled himself and stood fixed. But his hands, out of his pockets now, were clenched and quivering. Bailey burst into a laugh, and the situation tickled him so that the laugh rang true.

"Don't shoot," said he. "I've come from Tracy. He sent me down here —" at a venture adding recklessly, "to get the bag."

The man still trembled. It was not alone his hands: the tremor had crept over him, and he was silent for a moment, getting himself under, his racing blood, his quivering nerves. Then he asked a perfunctory question:

“What bag?”

“Oh, come,” said Bailey. “You know. The lost bag. Take me?”

“No,” said the man.

Yet he was quieting. Only it was evident that, from caution, he had decided to be dumb.

“You don’t believe he sent me,” said Bailey. “See here, I’ll prove it to you. You know Tracy’s number?”

He made no answer, yet it was evident he did.

“I’ll call him up.”

Bailey went to the telephone on a table in the corner, asked for toll operator and gave his long distance call, “to talk to Mr. Tracy.” In the interval of waiting, he kept up a rain of confirmatory remarks to his vis-a-vis, who had, it appeared, got back his nerve and was facing him steadily.

“I tell you,” said Bailey, “this is uncommon discouraging for Tracy. He sends me down here to get the bag — with instructions for you, too — and you won’t even tell me whether you’re the Johnnie I’m after. Hullo.” The bell had rung. “Mr. Tracy? Mr. Charles Tracy? Well, I’m here. According to instructions. Yes. Found him all right. What am I — Repeat that, please. What am I wearing? Why, same old togs. My cape, my spectacles, my altogether eccentric and admirable hat. Same as I wore in the picture on your desk. See? Oh, no! Tut! tut! May I not suggest that profanity is forbidden? You’ll be cut off. Now your man here won’t accept my credentials. Won’t recognize me. What? you’ll be down yourself? By motor? Straight off? Right away? (‘right away’ — admirable American language,” he commented, turning to the man behind him,) and then speaking again into the transmitter, while

Charles not having uttered a word, since the first "Hullo" and a solitary imprecation, was listening, Bailey gleefully thought, so hard you could hear his ear drums beating their own tattoo. "You're coming down, you say? by car?"

Then, irrepressibly, it seemed, the man behind him spoke, the words leaping out as if they had been in leash there, waiting for their chance:

"Am I to be ready? He comes himself to take me?"

Bailey hung up the receiver and turned to regard him, from a new enlightenment. It had simply seemed to him that Charles, being told his tormentor was down here, would undoubtedly take the wings of gasoline and fly down to probe this last impudence to its depths. But apparently he had unwittingly caught another bird in the snare set for his own pastime. So his queer acquaintance was expected to be ready; he trusted Bailey at last, or he wouldn't have said it. But a change came over the intense, wry face. The man drew back. He had repented his half betrayal, and he spoke now with violence:

"You do not suppose I have not seen that you wear a disguise? Your hair is a wig, your beard —" He spread his hands to indicate the absurdity of its palpable falseness, its utter futility as a self-respecting beard. "And your spectacles — would you have me believe those are lenses? No, they also are a disguise."

"My dear boy," said Bailey, without an instant's hesitation, "you are perfectly right. It is a disguise, except for the specs — those lenses are dead honest and a pretty penny they cost me — and the disguise is for you."

"For me? I will not have it. It is absurd. I have let my beard grow, I have let my hair. But this! this!" He paused, unable to express his utter contempt. "Why,

you are what you call a laughing stock. You would bring attention to yourself in any place."

"Right you are," said Bailey. "It is a rotten make-up. I wondered what made Tracy so stuck on it."

"But he could not be stuck. He is an able man, Mr. Tracy, and he has planned things extraordinarily well, because so simply, do you see?"

Again he spread his hands to indicate his disdain of a masquerade so meretricious.

"Well," said Bailey carelessly, "maybe you're right. Anyhow, that's what he said. Now if he's coming down here, he's well on his way and you'd better get your duds together."

"I am ready," said the other. He took his pipe from the table and put it in his pocket. "I have but to find my coat and hat."

"All right," said Bailey.

He rose from the chair by the telephone and made his way to the door. This was after a lingering look at the tray on the table; but there was one glass only and he was afraid, if he forced the issue of hospitality, the other might ring for a second, and who would bring it? Perhaps a stalwart flunkey who might not be so credulous.

"Where are you going?"

"I thought I'd just stroll down the drive," said Bailey, "through the shrubbery. See? In case anybody's hanging round. But I'll be back here when Tracy comes. You be ready down in the hall. Just inside the door."

"Just inside," said the other grimly. "I do not step outside that door until I hear Mr. Tracy's voice. And I shall be armed, you understand."

"The deuce you will," Bailey thought, with a whimsical recognition of his own luck. "If you were armed



while you sat here drinking your grog and singing about German mill wheels, little Ned Bailey might have a hole through him or at least been held up till Tracy came." But he was now at the door and turned back for a word. "Don't disturb anybody else."

"Anybody else?"

Did the fellow still regard him with suspicion, or did he not? was it the ordinary expression of the wry face?

Bailey made a vague gesture toward the back of the house.

"Servants' hall," he said. "You know. Don't call anybody. Just be ready and we'll slide the gang plank on."

Then he went, running down the stairs, not too hastily, he hoped, and out at the front door, pausing a moment on the steps and looking down into the dark shrubbery. Bailey had had few adventures which were of the body and not the nimble mind. He hardly knew, from the feeling of them, how mad enterprises of the body were to be conducted. He cherished an idea that if one were up to them there would be nothing quite so glorious in the world; but he had unhappily no asset for the glad rough and tumble of virile youth, nothing but length and lightness of leg. The shrubbery, with its dark softnesses of shadow, did look sinister. With a queer German duck in hiding there inside, who knew what flocks of equally suspicious ducks might be flying up the drive to the same sanctuary? What fun it all was! He ran down the steps and made long strides along the drive. At the turning, just when the gate was wide before him, with the crackle of no more than one step on the gravel something big was upon him, something strong, like a band of iron, enveloped him, a body so unyielding that it seemed as gigantic as the night



was against his body and a hand was over his mouth. And Bailey could only think that, after all, his mouth must be the most sensitive feature of his loquacious person, for he was conscious of a rueful wish that the creature would take off that beastly paw and, since there was no use in struggling, let him swear. However, there wasn't time for mental pleasantries; they were plunging along the drive, through the gateway and down the road, and now they stopped and Bailey blinked, for this was a car, and at their coming the lights flashed on. "Here we go!" he thought. "Hurrah!" Another man was standing beside the car; a third was at the wheel. Not a word was spoken until, as the one who had Bailey and the other who seemed ready to receive him were about to bundle him into the car, the third demanded:

"What the devil's he got on?"

"Disguised," said the first. "That's how I knew."

"Disguised nothin'. He's come out o' the movies."

They flashed a light on him, and he stood there, a man on each side of him, and free now, for since there were two of them they doubtless knew, if he tried to escape, he wouldn't have a chance. He felt the shame of that. He was so crumpled they despised him.

"Peel him," said the man who had waited for them, "and let's have a look at him. I don't want to elope with the wrong girl."

With what seemed one motion the others did peel him, hat, wig, whiskers, spectacles, and then they flashed the light on him again, and his captor was the one to speak. And such amazement was in his voice that it amounted to awe, — awe and a something Bailey put down in his delighted mind as respectful horror.

"Mr. Bailey!" said he, and that was all.

And now Bailey, who had been smiling at them sunnily, found his tongue. The respect and horror had put him back into that lightsome ease of mind where he ordinarily sojourned.

"Mr. Bailey, as you say," he returned, with his own jaunty self-sufficiency. "And may I not, sir, request a look at your visiting card? May I not also be permitted here in the dread vast and middle of the night on this lonesome road beset with dread to share with you the chestnut that although your face is unknown to me your manner is familiar?"

"Yes, Mr. Bailey, you know my face," said the other, from what sounded like extreme depression. "Not so well as I know yours, but I expect you know it."

He handed Bailey the flash-light and took off his hat. Bailey directed the light to him and had his turn of surprise and disbelief.

"Cross! by all that's holy."

Cross stood there, an authoritative figure, yet transformed from what must have been his assertive bearing of the moment before to the completest deference. Bailey took delight in the reflection that, in the exact fashion of helping a guest on with his overcoat, Cross would now, in a minute, offer to help him on with his whiskers and wig. The other man, who had looked on in silence, spoke now disgustedly.

"Well," he said, "you have made a mess of it, ain't you?"

He stepped into the car and sat down as if personally he abandoned all responsibility and interest. Bailey was quite himself. He raised a gleeful finger.

"Tut! tut!" said he. "Naughty, naughty! Lying in shrubberies, coiled to spring, falling on innocent masquer-

aders and sand-bagging them and placing large, serviceable hands, better made to pass decanters and squirt the cooling siphon, over mouths made to carol as gleefully as the innocent birds of dawn. That's free verse, Cross, only you can't tell till you see it printed. Cross, I am grieving over you. I weep for you, the walrus said."

Cross had recovered himself. He had quelled the incipient butler in him and stood erect, man to newspaper man.

"That's all right, Mr. Bailey," said he. "But I'd like to know what you're down here for anyway. And in that rig."

Bailey had a mild desire to try him, to see if he could summon back the butler again, by insidious appeal.

"Help me on with my rig, Cross," said he. "My wig, I should say. I don't believe we can manage the whiskers, do you? No? I'll tuck 'em in my pocket. Now my spectacles. I was accused to-night of having plain glass in 'em, but that's a libel. Thank you."

Cross had mechanically and deftly aided him in redecorating himself, and now the other spoke with some impatience from the car:

"Come, come! we can't stay here all night, gassin'."

"Indeed you can't," said Bailey, suddenly alert to the chances of the hour. "Tracy's on his way down here."

"In a car? "

Cross was alert enough now. The butler had popped inside the sentry box.

"Yes."

"What for? "

"Oh, I can't tell you," said Bailey. "It's too long. Only there's a queer Johnnie inside the house there — "

"You been in?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Tracy — John — gave me his key and sent me down to do an errand. And I found this Johnnie inside there alone —"

"Red whiskers?" said Cross. "Twisted mouth? big ears?"

"Yes."

"Know who he is?"

"No. Except he's a Teuton and got an excellent tenor voice."

"He's a big chemist and he's been making cultures for a veterinary disease they're going to spring on us, and his name's Adler. And we're hanging round here to kidnap him and turn him over."

"Don't tell me, Cross," said Bailey, in almost unbelievable delight, "that you're a secret service man."

"No, I'm not," said Cross curtly. "I'm an Englishman and I'm too old to join. I'm doing a job here and there when I can; but I know more about Charles Tracy than anybody does — but his Maker. Queer things have been going on down here, Mr. Bailey. The family don't know it, I expect, except Mr. John. And he don't know all."

"These gentlemen," said Bailey, still in his ecstasy, "these gentlemen in the car are government officials, minions of the law, their pockets full of warrants, and they are here to arrest our friend inside?"

"They're friends of mine, so to speak," said Cross. "We're doing it something the same way. We get the man and turn him over to the government, that's all."

"But why not turn your information over first," said

Bailey, "and let the government get him? Much simpler, Cross. Unless you want the fun of it. I quite understand that."

Cross lowered his voice.

"I was coming to that," he said. "Because I don't want Charles Tracy taken — not yet."

"Why not? Need more evidence?"

"No," said Cross, "but there's madam."

"But madam isn't living with him."

"I'm not going into that, sir. Nor whether madam will stay away now she's got away or whether she won't. But a friend of mine in the service tells me Miss Jessie has applied for passports for herself and madam. And when madam has gone, then I turn Mr. Tracy over."

"But Lord, Cross! if you want that fellow in there," said Bailey, suddenly alert to his own joyous share in the quest, "I can hand him to you. I made up a yarn about Tracy's coming down to get him, and he's there in the hall waiting, like a ripe apple, and you can pick him off the hat tree."

"I can't get into the hall," said Cross, in a suddenly stimulated interest. "Can you get him out?"

"No. He half thinks I'm what I told him, but he won't quite eat out of my hand. I can let you in all right. Lord, if I hadn't forgot I've got a key. Come on in with the car. That's what he's waiting for."

Cross did not answer; the other man opened the door of the car and signed Bailey to enter. He did and the car started, Cross on the running board, and they were driven noiselessly up the drive and stopped at the front door. There Cross stepped off, went up the steps and placed himself in shadow in the corner of the porch. The other followed him and they stood together. Upon

this Bailey fitted the key in the door and stepped in, whistling softly, prepared with an ingenuous facial vacuity to meet his man. But the hall was empty, and he did feel momentarily dashed and not so clever as he had the instant before: not nearly so clever nor important either. But almost at once a voice came from the head of the stairs.

"I am here. I am armed. And I shall not come down until I know that is Mr. Tracy's car."

"Of course it's Tracy's car," said Bailey cheerfully. "Don't be an ass. But before you do come down, go back into that room and turn off the light."

"There is no occasion for turning off the light," said Adler, and Bailey was encouraged to suspect his teeth were chattering. Chemistry and the evolving of deadly bacilli were not, perhaps, conducive to personal courage, even if one were, as Adler had announced, armed.

"Then I will," said he, running up the stairs. "Oh, put down your gun. If you make a hole in me you'll have to settle with Tracy for messing up his stairs."

He reached the man, elbowed past him, scarcely looking at him, and turned, as if to the room at the right. But judging that the fellow, in his surprise, might not continue to cover him, he whirled, sprang back, struck up Adler's hand and held it, and they clinched, Bailey unscientifically, without a notion how you took your adversary yet hanging on like death and giving one strident yell for Cross. And Cross came, he and the other man, three stairs at a bound, and between them Adler was dragged struggling down the stairs. Bailey plunged after them, conscious of a confused scuffle at the foot, wherein a woman, stalwart beyond belief, appeared from nowhere and took part, and that she cried aloud for Fritz, who never came at



all, and that he himself had to push her back into the hall by main strength after the others had gone out and that he held the door against her. The two packed Adler into the car and Cross called back to Bailey:

“Coming, sir?”

“No,” said Bailey. “Hold on. Give me your town address.”

Cross threw it at him in two words, street and number, and the car started. That instant Bailey relinquished his hold on the door and ran like a cat round the side of the house, past the garage and into the orchard. And now he knew he was at last afraid; but it was of the woman who was outside now and yelling like a banshee for Fritz. Though he had taken the wood path so many times, it was not familiar to his foot in the dark, but he turned on his flash-light and ran by fits and starts, stopping to verify his way and dashing on again. Thus he came to the little bridge, took out his bag, thrust into it his hat, wig, whiskers and cape, put on the soft cap he had in his pocket and went on to the station. He was in doubt of what he should find there. Would it be Charles arrived from town and, having heard the tale of abduction, hot on his trail, would it be the woman shrieking for Fritz, or would it be Fritz himself? But the station, wrapped in darkness except for its one light, was shrouded in silence, too, and Bailey hung about outside until his train came in and then, the only one to take it, got on and sat down to think things over. Seriously now: there was no laughter left in it. For Charles Tracy was guilty of harboring an alien enemy the law was hunting, and John, though he was his brother, must be told. Bailey couldn't stay down here as he had meant to, to search the woods by daylight for hypothetical bags. John must be told at once.



## XXVIII

BAILEY did not fly to John with his batch of news. He went instead, in the early morning, to Cross, found him in a lodging in a West End street, what Bailey called "grummy," but rigidly self-respecting, and Cross himself in bed. He was full of shocked apology at being found in that relaxation, but Bailey took a chair and told him to hush up, since men must sleep, all save heroes like himself. He'd lain awake all the night he found left to him, thinking out the miserable business at Grasslands.

"And, Cross," he said, "you've got to hand in your evidence. That's flat."

Cross looked obstinate.

"I met you fair and square, Mr. Bailey," said he, "man to man. I told you what I was doing, and I trusted you to keep mum. I don't recall whether everything I said to you was confidential, but I took it for granted you'd use your judgment and act fair. If you force my hand, you ain't acting fair. No, you ain't."

Cross, at this time, was a curious compound of the deferent and the masterful. But it wasn't necessary to be deferent with Bailey, who had little regard for the class obliquities of life, and who could, without feigning, meet him man to man.

"Now see here," said he, "your perspective's all wrong. Charles Tracy's a criminal. And you've got him. It's up to you to do something. It isn't as if he'd seen the error of his ways, cried on your bosom and sworn he'd

stop harboring germ fiends and sworn to me he'd cut out propaganda in his paper. He's going right on, and you're the man to trip him up. And you won't do it."

Cross answered from his heart, but with a lamentable lack of logic:

"I want madam to go to France."

"Madam's nothing to do with it," said Bailey. "Here's Charles Tracy, and Charles Tracy's a traitor. What are you going to do about it?"

Cross thought, a long five minutes. He was sitting up in bed, as more respectful, and a sun ray struck upon his unshaven cheek and disordered hair and gave Bailey a momentary gleeful thought that, if he'd seen a butler in undress before, he should never have contemplated with anguish the possibility of using the wrong fork. At length Cross turned upon him a distraught and saddened face.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Bailey," he said, "I'll go round and see Mr. Tracy — Mr. Charles's father, I mean — and tell him the whole business."

"What good's that going to do?" inquired Bailey inexorably. "You'll only get the family by the ears, and ten chances to one some of 'em'll make a passionate appeal to the erring son and Master Charles'll say it's all poppycock and kick up his heels and off he'll go, and you've lost him."

But Cross was meeting his gaze, eye to eye. And he spoke with an immovable obstinacy.

"I can ask Mr. Tracy to see to madam's going abroad."

Bailey pleaded with him, reasoned, swore at him, and then got up and clapped him on his pyjamaed back and told him he was a great old sport.

"Well," he said, "if you're going to see Mr. Tracy,

when will you go? I ought to be handing in a report to John, you understand, and I can't do it till I know what you've done."

"To-night," Cross told him. He would go that night. So Bailey left him.

That night Cross, having assured himself that Charles had gone to Mrs. Davenport's, went round to the West End house and asked to see Mr. Tracy. He did not send up his name. It was a message, he told the maid at the door, most important. Norris was in his study, the evening paper before him, staring in a daze at the printed words, and thinking about Charles. And when Cross appeared and stopped just inside the doorway, he looked at him for a puzzled moment, debating where he had seen him before. There was in Cross an inexplicable difference from the Cross Norris Tracy had known. It could not be said that his old humility had gone, but he was still regarding the individual as man to man.

"Ah," said Norris, "Cross. A message, you said?"

He couldn't remember what Charles had told him about dismissing Cross, whether he had said anything definite. There must have been dissatisfaction somewhere. So he looked at him and waited.

"May I shut the door, Mr. Tracy?" asked Cross, with deference and yet an implication that he was going to shut it anyway.

Tracy nodded, and when it had been done and they were again facing each other, now in a privacy implying something of importance, he asked:

"Well, what is it?"

"I should like to mention," said Cross, "in the beginning, that my errand is confidential."

Norris said nothing and again waited.

"The amount of it is," went on Cross, with no embarrassment but a perfection of concise matter of fact statement it would have been hard to challenge, "Mr. Charles, sir, is being watched."

Norris gave the slightest perceptible start; it was a movement of the foot only, but in reality it seemed to him his heart leaped out of its place, and that he must gasp before he got his breath normally again. Cross appeared to understand he wasn't to be helped out, and went on, as if he had an everyday matter to state, yet impressively, too:

"Mr. Charles is doing German propaganda work. He has harbored an alien wanted by the government, one of a gang conspiring against the allies — and the States, too, Mr. Tracy, I give you my word."

Norris got up from his chair, pushing it violently to one side, and walked to the window, and there he stood, his back to Cross, staring out at the lights in the house opposite and conscious of the iron band about his forehead and the thickness of his breath. A girl came to the window opposite and presently another girl joined her and put an arm about her and they waltzed back into the room to the pounding of a piano. The little picture etched itself on his memory, so that whenever afterward he thought of his son's downfall, he saw two girls waltzing and heard a trumpery tune. Then, at last, because he had to meet the blow in exactly the way it was dealt him and no other, he turned back into the room, walked to the table and stood there, one hand finding the support of the pile of books at the end, and faced round upon Cross who had not stirred from the spot he had occupied when he first came in.

"You want," said Norris, "to have him warned."

"No, sir," said Cross imperturbably. "I want you to tell madam that it is time for her to go abroad. I want you to see she goes."

There was such authority in his voice, such certainty of having weighed the situation and hit upon a conclusion quite aside from any suggestion of controlling it, that Norris made the only reply commensurately indicated:

"Sit down."

Cross sat and Norris took his own chair and bade him curtly, but with kindness, because it was apparent that Cross didn't like his job:

"Go ahead. Tell me what you know and where you found it out."

Then Cross, not picturesquely but quite as if he told the story of any errand he had been sent to do, gave the brief history of Adler, a chemist who had been watched for a long time by government experts and who, just at the moment when the case was clear against him and he was wanted, could not be found. Cross knew why, for this same man had been in Charles Tracy's house here in town over and over, while Cross was still in service there; he had met the gentlemen who had their secret meetings in Charles's billiard room.

"How do you know there were meetings?" asked Norris abruptly, hating these ways of vulgar espionage but seeing the slough must be penetrated to the firmer land beyond, if indeed there were any land firm enough, in these days, for him to set his foot on.

"I had been present, sir," said Cross, "several times."

"Present? how present?"

"There is a little attic room there, sir, that Mr. Charles closed up as soon as he began to use the billiard room for meetings. He took in some of the wall space when he

built in his safe. It used to be a servant's room. Every time Mr. Charles had a meeting he gave me an evening out, and I would come back again, after half an hour or so, and go up to the little room. It had a dormer. I used to get out of that—the roof sloped some three feet to the gutter there—and lie along the slope with my feet in the gutter and my ear to the window of the billiard room."

Norris regarded him, his length, his sinewy height, and said:

"You couldn't. A man like you can't lie along roofs and gutters."

"It was a bit awkward sometimes," said Cross simply. "It was hardly dangerous. I'd had the gutters reënforced."

"Besides," objected Norris, as if, in fighting these details, he might make out some sort of a case for Charles, "you couldn't have heard if you did."

"That window was never shut entirely," said Cross. "I managed that every night before they came."

"You had keys?"

"Yes, sir."

"To that room and the next?"

"Yes, Mr. Tracy."

"Where'd you get them? My son didn't give them to you."

"I have a large acquaintance," said Cross. "And while I was with Mr. Charles, it was easy for me to admit workmen to the house."

"Ah!" said Norris, catching at the implied admission, "You have a large acquaintance among workmen. I suppose you're a socialist."

"No, Mr. Tracy," said Cross, "I'm not a socialist."

But I am an Englishman — Lincolnshire, sir — and whenever I've seen there was German work going on over here I've tried to nail it, that's all. I began to suspect Mr. Charles first because he had the billiard room made over and kept the key of it and forbade madam to go in ——”

“He forbade her?”

“Yes, sir. I heard him.”

“You must have done a deal of listening.”

“Yes, sir,” said Cross, unmoved. “I was listening most of the time — when I could do it without the other servants knowing.”

“And with the end in view of sometime giving up Mr. Charles?”

“That's got to come, Mr. Tracy,” said Cross, with finality. “Either I've got to do it or somebody else will. They're not onto him yet, in spite of his paper. It's too clever for 'em. But they will be. He'll make a misstep. They always do. And there's enough now to hang him.”

“Go on,” said Norris. “This Adler. You say he's been taken.”

“Yes, sir. Last night.”

“Where?”

“At Grasslands.”

Now Norris was really roused. His house, his own, the dearly loved, was being used for the workshop of these evil forces.

“Take care,” said he. “I don't believe that, you know.”

“I've been at Grasslands quite a bit lately, sir,” said Cross, undisturbed. “There are three of us that have gone in together on this thing, and we've put in all our time with Mr. Charles.”

“Why?” asked Norris. “Why, in God's name?”



"Because, Mr. Tracy, he looks to us quite the most dangerous agent about here."

Norris took that gallantly. Cross wasn't going to spare him, he saw, and neither did he want to be spared. This was, after all, his job, not in any degree that of the man before him.

"Are you giving all your time to it?" he asked, regardless of his own pangs and pressing on into the brush of dark possibilities.

"At present, yes, sir."

"Who stakes you?"

"I do, sir. I've laid up quite a bit, and I don't see anything better I could do with it than turn it in. Blighty, they call her, you know, sir. Curious name, isn't it?"

The next question Norris meant logically to ask him, he knew he must, wherever the path of honor led him, refuse to utter:

"I suppose you've come to me for money; you expect to be paid for holding your tongue?"

If he had wanted to ask it, if the money had been lying there, a pile of dirty metal to buy off his son's name, he could not have asked the question. For Cross was telling the truth. His motives were as solid and clearly outlined in this fog of treachery as an ivory tower with lights.

"Go ahead," he bade him. "You say Adler was down there. What then?"

"We took him, sir, that's all," said Cross. "We have some friends in the service, and we turned him over. He'll be tried in due course."

"And you'll give evidence that he was taken at my country house."

"No, sir, I don't think they'll go into that. Our car took him well on towards the turnpike where another car was standing ——"

"By arrangement?"

"Yes, sir. He was transferred from our car to the other, and the evidence is that our car then got away."

"Also arranged?"

"We got away, sir," said Cross. "That's all. That's all the prisoner himself will know. And he won't mention Grasslands or Mr. Charles. The fatherland's too dear to him. Mr. Charles is valuable."

"Well," said Norris, "well?"

"Then," said Cross, hesitating slightly, as if he had kept back his most conclusive facts and hated to submit them, "I've some papers here, Mr. Tracy, that I'd like to leave with you."

"More evidence?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where'd you get 'em?"

"They were intended for a submarine commander to carry back to Germany. The commander was at Grasslands to get them and to bring another batch. The other batch we haven't got. We couldn't get it. But these were in a bag which was evidently taken from the captain before he left your house. And I was hanging round the house that night and I got them from the man that took it."

"Who was he?"

"I didn't see him clearly," said Cross, a perfection of smooth veracity in his tone. There was to be no mention of John in this or of Bailey. He didn't propose complicating matters to unknown ends. "He ran down through your orchard and into your woods ——"

"The wood path to the station?"

"Yes, sir. I followed him. He stopped and put the bag under that little bridge by the alders."

"Good Lord!" said Norris, ineptly as he felt, the moment he had said it, "where the cardinals grow!"

"I waited till he'd gone on, and then I took it out, cut it open, put the papers in my pockets and hid the bag again. That was in a patch of cedars on the way across to the western division. I didn't take the train at your station, do you see, sir? I went across country quite a bit. And next day I came back by car and got the bag. I felt as if I'd got to have it all, as I found it."

"Where is it?"

"At home, sir, in my lodgings."

"And you say you have the papers for me?"

"Copies of them, sir. I had copies taken at once, so I could put the papers themselves where they wouldn't be come on if anything happened to me."

"If anything did happen to you, what would become of them?"

"I'd rather you didn't ask me that, sir."

"In other words, you won't tell."

But Cross was taking from his pocket legal size envelopes that Norris afterward found to hold typewritten sheets of thin paper. There was a vast amount of material in them.

"And these," said Norris, "you propose leaving with me? For what purpose?"

"I want you to see, sir," said Cross earnestly, "to see for yourself just what the evidence is against Mr. Charles. You'll find others are implicated, too. And when you see it, you'll understand something has got to happen. It may happen soon. And I want you to send madam abroad."

Norris frowned, not in irritation at this meddling with madam, even to her advantage, but with an intentness on the problem. It was still impossible to resent what Cross had said. He was simply a man entirely in earnest who was doing his job as he must.

"You want to save her," he said, "the disturbance of this — the — the disgrace. Is that it?"

"Madam is — different," said Cross, with an irrelevance that seemed to them both to cover everything. "Different from anybody."

"Very well," said Norris. "I'll look these over at once. When can you come for them? or shall I send them to you? Or ——"

"Yes, sir," said Cross. "You might keep them. You see, I have the first drafts."

He got up and, instead of turning to the door, went to the window, approaching it at the side where he was screened by the heavy curtain.

"What is it?" asked Norris.

Cross turned about and came back to the door.

"Nothing, sir, as it happens. There's a fellow been hanging round here for some days. I waited a good bit before I came to-night, but some one went out of your door and he followed him."

"Somebody hanging round my house?" said Norris. "Impossible. What for?"

"It just happens so," said Cross. "A good many people are being shadowed now."

"Some of your fellows, do you mean?"

"No, sir. Oh, no. I should say Mr. Charles."

"My son watching this house! Absurd! And who do you say went out? Who was it the fellow followed?"

"Mr. John, sir."

“What for?”

Cross had nothing to offer here. But to cover the necessity of answering something, he did remark discreetly:

“I couldn’t say, sir,” and took his leave, Norris staring after him and inwardly fuming with an uneasy curiosity.

But he hadn’t time to waste on that now. He went back to his table, took up the orderly sheaf of papers Cross had left him and began to read. And as he read, incredulous, angry with the very sound of words that seemed to prove something that could not possibly be susceptible of proof, scornful even of such treason touching one of his blood, he knew in his leaden heart that every word was true. And the others implicated, the names he knew and the world knew — what madness stalked abroad upon the earth, what rottenness was at her heart that these malformed souls could be born of her, live upon her surface and draw breath from her sun-laden air? Of these, he told himself he need not think. His son’s degeneracy was enough for him to grapple with. Yet, turn aside as he might, he knew the whole earth was poisoned for him by the evil heart of man. At the end, he gathered up the papers and mechanically put them in order again, fitting corners with an aimless care, and sat holding them in his shaking hands. And then he realized he had not been silent. He had groaned, he had called upon God, and his mind sprang back across the bright love-lighted chasm of the years to the dark moments when he had been waiting to hear his sons were born and his wife had gone through her travail to the first resting place beyond. Then he must have groaned, for he could hear himself in that terrible note of a man’s lament. And

as he laid the papers down, he saw before him the essay he had been writing on Charles's character. "The Politician," he had called it, and it read like an abstract study. It had not seemed to touch his son at all. But it was his son, moving through its every page. And through his own art, which had not carried him far in swaying men, he had learned the better to understand his son. So well, indeed, that the papers Cross had brought him caused him no real surprise. They but confirmed what he already knew, not as to facts indeed but what he had learned of the inner possibilities of his son's malign will. Suddenly he hated the papers in his hand and threw them on the table and, urged by his extremity of grief, rose and went up the stairs to his father's room. And there he found grandsir sitting, not at the table with his perfunctory occupations before him, but at the fireplace, his chair turned so that he obliquely faced the door. And so haggard did he look, so old, so wild with apprehension, that Norris, who had never seen his calm thus broken, forgot his own distress and asked:

"What is it, father? What's the matter?"

The old man's mood seemed to break and leave him some relief from its intensity. He drew a breath and said:

"I rather thought you'd come."

"But what is it?" Norris brought a chair and sat down near him. "Who's been up here? anybody been disturbing you?"

Grandsir shook his head.

"Nothing real, my boy," he said, "nothing solid. But there are strange things round this house to-night."

Norris, clairvoyant in the intensity of his own feeling, knew what he meant. They were not actual things that were peopling the house, not stealthy steps and hostile

faces, but fears, regrets, aching lamentations, the waking ghosts of family life, the genius of the race, lamenting that one among them should have been false to universal bonds.

"I know what it is, father," said he, tranquillizing his voice for his father's sake and also finding it easier to bear his own apprehensions now another was standing up with him against the ghost. "It's Charles. We're all worried about him. We're so afraid of what he's doing and what's going to happen to him that our fears are stalking round the house."

Then, as he met the sad response in his father's face, he realized for the first time that grandsir was an old man: older than his years. The war, besides killing youth in its hideous ways at the front, was stamping out age because age had its own foes within the citadel and must meet a double menace. Yet this old man was not terrified in any sense of apprehension. He merely looked woefully tired of it all.

"I have made up my mind, Norris," he said, "that it's a losing battle."

"You mean the war?" Norris ventured. Yet he knew his father did not mean the war.

"No. I mean the fight—life in the dark here, life for you, life for Charles ——"

"That's it," said Norris, as he paused. "What are we going to do about Charles?"

"Do you realize," said grandsir, striking the arm of the chair with his delicate hand in what looked like an impotent anger, "that he is the spirit of evil in this house and that he dominates us all?"

"No, no," said Norris. But it was a perfunctory denial. "How does he dominate us?"

"It has always been so. You and Emily have agonized



over him and prayed and besought him. And when he's good, you're so glad you conciliate him and let him lead you. You've let John grow up anyhow compared with Charles. And yet John is a straight, clean fellow and Charles has a black drop."

"Father," said Norris, beside himself with apprehension for his father as well as his son, "what makes you say these things? What do you know?"

"Nothing," said the old man, "except what I gather from his paper. And that's of no consequence really, compared with the other things that walk in here at night and show me their naked faces. Good God, Norris! do you think there's nothing in being old and lying here with the ghosts of all the Tracys walking in and out when you can't sleep? If there's a doom on one of us, don't you suppose we can get wind of it by listening out into the midnight? There are more wirelesses than the kinds that zip and buzz."

The very air about Norris seemed to be thrilling with strange intelligences, their wings suffocating him, keying him to a horrible suspense. He tried to beat them off, to bring his nerves down to a plane where he could calm his father also.

"Well," he said, "we needn't think of it to-night."

"We've got to think of it every day and night," said his father, "till we've made our decision. And I've made mine. I made it just before you came in. If one of us is a traitor — yes, if it's Emily's son and yours and Helen's husband — he's got to be given over to be tried and punished. He's got to be tripped up, tied, bound, anything to stop him. One man can't be allowed to stand in the way of other innocent men. He's got a black drop, and God knows where it comes from. But it's there, and

we Tracys are bound to see it doesn't spread, even if it brings us to the shedding of blood."

He did not look shaken now nor old. He looked like a slight, it is true, delicate, but indestructible intelligence, transmitting the will of his kin. But Norris hardly saw how he was to be brought down from these heights, to rest and the comfort of the night. There was a sound at the door, Erastus Triphammer, rosy, wholesome, interrogative, in a solicitous way, as if he felt the storm in the air and wondered if he could lead somebody to shelter. Grandsir, too, saw him, stared at him an instant, hardly recognizing him within the boundaries of his flaming vision, and broke into a crowing laugh.

"Bones!" he said, "good boy, Bones! he's come to put me to bed. Good night, Norris. The ghosts have gone. Didn't you hear them scuttling, when he came?"

Norris got up and stood for a minute, his hand on the back of his father's chair, while they looked at each other whimsically, and grandsir with a humor that eased the band about his son's heart. Meantime Bones was going about, setting the room to rights, and Norris felt a rush of gratitude to him for being so wholesome and so kind, like the good earth.

"Good night," he said and grandsir answered almost jovially.

But as Norris went down the stairs, he told himself he had got his orders. Whatever was to be done about Charles, it should be without recourse to grandsir. The frail old body could not join in this passionate weaving of the family destiny. It might select the pattern, but it couldn't throw the shuttle any more. He passed his own room and went on to the lower hall, and there he met his wife, entering the front door. She wore an evening cloak

and a piece of lace over her head, and her face was sunken into grief of the patient, acquiescent type. We know that look. It belongs to all time. The Mother of Sorrows wears it. Norris was alarmed by it, angry in a measure, too. Must he meet with anticipatory tragedy at every point, from the top of the house down? But he was chiefly concerned at seeing her come in from the night where he had been told a mystery of surveillance lay over the house. He took her cloak, touched her hand and found it cold.

"Emily, child, where have you been?" he scolded her. "You mustn't go running out alone. Why didn't you call me?"

She did not answer, but went into the sitting-room, where he followed her. There she sat down before the fire, and he threw a log on the smouldering coals and made them blaze. She put her hand to the warmth and then, as if it gave her heart to speak, said, in a dull voice:

"I have been to see Charles."

"To see Charles? Where? At his house?"

"Yes."

"What for? Why didn't you telephone him to come round?"

"I got frightened," said Emily.

"About him?"

"Yes. There was something in the house to-night that frightened me—a feeling, you know, as if things were going to happen. And I knew it was Charles."

"I wish," said Norris gently, drawing up a chair and taking her cold hand, to stroke it, "when you get scared you'd feel like calling me."

"I couldn't," she said. "I knew it would worry you. I couldn't even call grandsir. He'd have been frightened, too. Besides, it was about Charles."

And suddenly both of them had a vision — and each knew the other had it — of the time when Charles had been ailing in babyhood and Emily had taken him off with her to sleep, because Norris mustn't lose his rest. He was at work on a novel — he knew which one it was — and the novel had fallen flat somehow, and here was the son Emily had soothed in his small miseries, and the son was not only a family shame but a menace of the nation, too. Norris felt the futility of it all, of what we seek to do and what is mysteriously denied. Yet within him a voice kept crying, even though it was shaken by the sight of these mother's tears, "Lift up the gates. Put your weak shoulders under and lift, with all the millions of men that are lifting, that the king of glory of plain truth, plain honor, may come in."

But now he had to comfort Emily.

"Well," he said, "you found Charles? you found him all right?"

She shuddered.

"He was upstairs," she said.

"In the billiard room?"

"Yes. How did you know? A man came to the door, a peculiar man, Norris, not like Cross, not — not well trained in any way, do you see? He had the air of wanting to keep me out. But I said I was Charles's mother, and where was he? for he'd said at first Mr. Tracy was engaged. He was very doubtful, and I stepped in. Then he spoke up to him. There is a telephone in the hall. There never used to be. And Charles came down."

She stopped here and Norris had to remind her to go on.

"Well?" he said. "He was glad to see you, wasn't he? Unusual for you to run round there. I don't believe you've been since we came up."

"He was excited," said Emily. "I can't find any other word for it. Annoyed."

"With you?"

"Yes, in a way. That is, he explained he couldn't ask me to sit down, because he'd a business meeting up in the billiard room: some men he couldn't get together at any other time."

"Yes," said Norris, "quite natural. Of course he didn't want wandering ladies dropping in on high finance. You ought to have asked me, dear. I could have told you it was no time to go."

But Emily wasn't listening. She was retracing the paths of her talk with Charles.

"He didn't ask me to sit down —"

"Couldn't, dear. He'd got his meeting up there."

"I know, I know. He put his arm round me and got me to the door, and then I couldn't bear it and I said, 'O Charles, I'm afraid your paper is all wrong. You've got hold of the wrong end of everything, and you break my heart.'" She looked at him with her clear sad eyes, as if craving his forgiveness there. "I had to say that. I've never begged and prayed Charles. But I felt, if he was saying the wrong things and influencing people the wrong way, I'd tell him — it was only fair, I thought — just how he breaks my heart."

"Well, what'd he say?"

"He laughed and said my heart shouldn't be broken if he could help it, and he'd get rid of the paper, if I liked. But he opened the door and put me out, and I was standing there on the step. And I heard him call the man, and his voice was raised and I knew he was swearing at him for letting me in."

"Left you on the steps, did he?" said Norris, forgetting

for the minute he had told her Charles couldn't desert his business meeting. "He might at least have come round with you."

"Norris," said his wife, "I'm frightened. What are we going to do?"

"The first thing for you to do," said Norris, with decision, "is to get into hot water and then go to bed. Your hand is like a frog. And don't grizzle about it, Emily. Don't worry. He's told you he'll get rid of the paper. Anyhow, don't think about it to-night."

She was not convinced. He could not instil any hopefulness into her, but she did let him coax her up to bed and gradually got to listening while he talked to her about small commonplace things. And when she had relaxed a little, in grateful love to him, he left her and went downstairs again. The circle was narrowing about him. Grandsir was not to fight out the issue with him. And now, after that one first look at her sorrowing face, he saw Emily also must be exempt. She was not to be allowed to remember her son came to his penalty while she bore the knowledge of it and did not save him. Now he waited for John. Could his son stand with him within that awful circle of decision where he was preparing his verdict against Charles?

## XXIX

JOHN was late in coming. He had been to Bailey because Bailey had not come to him and had heard the story of Adler's kidnapping. And he was not only so tired when he came in but so absorbed in thinking back over the path Bailey had led him that he would have liked to ignore his father's voice from the sitting-room. Norris sat before the fire waiting, no book or paper in his hand, and with the purpose of an interview so evident in his attitude that John threw his weariness aside and resolved to make the time his own. For he had things to say. He made no introduction to his purpose.

"Wait a minute," he said, "till I get an apple. I told Maggie to leave a dish outside the dining-room window."

He disappeared and was presently back with a basket of red beauties.

"It's no good cooling an apple in an ice-box," he said, with an oracular gravity, selecting carefully and setting the basket beside him on the floor. "Outside air's the thing. Have one?"

No, Norris wouldn't have one. But while he was considering his way to John's confidence, John plunged in and took the talk into his own hands.

"I've been over to Bailey's."

"Ah? Finch and Brennan there, I s'pose."

"No. That is, they were, but we turned 'em out. Bailey'd got things to say. He's been down to Grasslands."



“Ah!” Another contingent down at Grasslands, Norris thought. It struck him events were making rather free with Grasslands. But he was refusing to commit himself. The moment John came into the room, he knew, struck by the beauty of his worn young face — a beauty of high resolve it was, too — that he was not going to bring any puzzle of dread decision into the appealing sensitiveness of that face. “Enough to hang him.” That phrase kept beating through his brain. If Charles had earned the penalty of being hanged, John wasn’t the one to push him to the scaffold and remember thereafter that he was, in a measure however slight, his brother’s slayer.

“You see,” said John, “I went down there myself Wednesday because I overheard Charles telling you he was going and wanted the rest of us kept off the premises. I knew what that meant: he was up to something. I went down there and I found out.” Thereupon he told the story of the secret conclave in the library and of his own theft of the bag and its after disappearance. “Of course,” he said, “if there was a chap following me, he saw me chuck it under the bridge and he was the one that took it out.”

“Who was he?” Norris asked.

“Don’t know.”

“Who do you think?”

“Haven’t an idea. One of Charles’s gang. That’s natural to suppose. Next day I sent somebody down.” No word of Jessie here. John, lawless enough in his own person, did cherish certain rigors imbibed from Tracy manuals, and applied them to other people, chiefly girls. Jessie was a great sport, but she shouldn’t be mixed up with amateur spying, bless her! “And I should think Charles had it safely back again, except that Mrs. Davenport and, I should say from the description, a chap named

Adler, were hunting round there, too. And what could they be hunting for but that one thing? Now you listen to what Bailey found out."

He told Bailey's story succinctly, through the kidnapping of Adler, and Norris listened without comment. But all the time there ran through his mind an undercurrent of resolve that John should know no more than he did now. John stopped, went on with his apple and waited for his father to speak. Here came a new bewilderment, for Norris apparently felt no surprise.

He merely said:

"We'll let this end here, you understand. You won't go to your mother with it, nor grandsir?"

John threw his core into the fire and stared after it. His hand mechanically sought the basket at his side, but he sat holding the apple selected, turning it over and over.

"No," he said, "not mum. Of course not. But grandsir — I always expect grandsir to tell me what to do."

"Not in this case, John," said his father. Another surprise this. Norris had exacted no rigid obedience from his sons. His fatherhood had been a comfortable old coat worn with negligent ease. "This is my business."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said John, staring at him. "But," he reasoned boyishly, "it was only through me Bailey found it out."

"Do you want the job of getting your brother into trouble?" his father inquired, seeking the only way he knew to throw him off the scent. "Is that it?"

John did not answer. The color slowly suffused his face and his eyes grew hot. At length he did speak, and with a gentleness that touched Norris greatly.

"Father, I don't hate Charles."

It was, Norris knew, a great confession, the equivalent of many things. "Charles is one of us," it meant. "I want to save him. I want to save us all. But if anybody's going to stand up to this job of getting him into the trouble he deserves, I'm ready to be the one."

"I know," said Norris. "I know all about it. I only mean you've got to give the thing into my hands and leave it there. Oh, hang it all, John! I ask you to. You'll let me if I ask you?"

"All right," said John. He got up, leaving his apples there on the floor. The look of his forlornness touched his father immeasurably. John had come to him with the evidence that had staggered his own reason, and he was simply being told to go away and be a little boy again and keep his meddling small fingers out of great affairs. "I only told you," he said, "because I thought you ought to know what Charles wanted Grasslands for. Besides — well, I thought you were the one to know."

"I am the one to know," said Norris. He rose and hoped for a minute he could put his arm over the strong young shoulders, but somehow didn't dare. They couldn't blubber over each other, two men grown, and pledge their fealty. So he ended lamely: "I'm in a devil of a hole about all this, John. You let me crawl out the best way I can. And if you can give me a hand, I'll tell you. Honest I will."

"All right," said John again, though not more cheerfully, and went off to bed.

Norris stayed a miserable half hour by the fire, wishing he had any of the emotional reliefs of more pliant human nature before him and cursing the shyness of the male animal which wouldn't let him call out to the other, equally suffering and equally shy. John, he knew, was off

up there by himself in the pathetic loneliness of youth denied the sympathy of age. But the one conclusion of it was, he knew, as he covered the fire, that he was indubitably alone in his circle of decision. He went over it all again. Neither grandsir nor Emily could be admitted there, and he had learned, with an added conviction after the sight of John's wistful face, that he must be kept even farther off than they. Age had a shorter time to suffer. Youth was setting out on the long, long road.

The next morning he went over to Helen's, and found her and Jessie at their task. They were delighted to see him, also surprised, for he had never called upon them here. They got up and fussed about him with much solicitude, and when they were seated he found himself greatly touched by their pleasure in him. Helen was quite flushed with it. "Nice girls!" he thought. "Dear, pretty girls!" and he was going indirectly to thrust them out into the stress of the world's dire extremity. He meant to give no reason for their going. Only they must go.

"Keep on working," he said to them. "I can talk better if you're not looking at me."

So they settled to their deft-handed task and he watched the white fingers flying, with an attention he hoped would keep his eyes from any too pronounced interrogation of their faces, to confuse or make him stumble.

"The fact is," he said, "I've come to hurry you girls off. Jessie's on pins to go to France. I want you both to go. I want you to go as soon as you can break up here."

The white hands paused over their work. He was aware of that, but he would not lift his eyes to theirs. Jessie had drawn a quick breath. She was with him, he knew. She had been pushing everybody mentally, for a

long space, to clear the way to France. But Helen asked an instant question:

“Why do you want us to go?”

“It’s a very unsatisfactory state of things here,” said Norris, presenting the argument as he had arranged it. “Disheartening for you, and unnecessarily so. You want to go. You both want it. Why not go now?”

Then Helen gave him a challenge that brought his eyes to her face.

“What is it?” she asked. “What have you found out?”

Their eyes met and held. He was dominated by the force and brilliancy of her look. She knew there was something underneath and she was determined on dragging it out. But he wasn’t going to be forced by this dear creature to her own undoing. He would keep his prede-termined way. Still meeting her eyes, he answered doggedly:

“It’s an impossible situation for you here. You’ve left Charles, but you’re likely to meet him any hour in the day. You have your common friends. You don’t explain. Oh, of course, I know you can’t. But it’s deuced awkward just the same. The whole thing’s impossible. You’re too near. And with everybody going to France, you’ve every reason for going, too. It’s a way out.”

“Daddy,” said Helen, “dear daddy, you’ve got to tell me.” (Was the siren calling him that, he thought ruefully, for added invincible persuasion?) “What have you found out about him?”

“Well,” said Norris, “I don’t want to go into this business of the newspaper woman.” He was resolved to keep it on that basis, but he found himself flinching, though he met her gaze. Indeed, it seemed to him now he had to meet

it. "In fact, I know no more about that than you do, probably not so much. Only it's uncomfortable. It's—it's impossible. And the best thing you girls can do is to get away."

She wasn't going to release him from the appealingness of her eyes or the challenge of her will.

"Just what," she asked, "have you found out?"

Then, because he felt his defences crumbling and knew, though he had meant to save her, that she had as much right as he to the knowledge of what might befall his son, he said plainly:

"Helen, I'd rather you wouldn't ask me. And if you do, I'm not sure I shall tell you. But I will tell you this much. Charles is pro-German. Whether he's paid for it or not, I don't know. And he's likely to be found out. And if he is found out, I'd rather you and Jessie were away."

She got up from the table and walked once back and forth through the room. Then she sat down again, at a nearness to Norris that let him see the clear wells of her eyes, the threads of dark color in them so cunningly enhancing their rich beauty, and said to him:

"You think you'd surprise me, shock me, kill me perhaps, if you told me what you know. Whatever it is, I could surprise you more."

Then, with no self-explanatory comment and an undeviating directness, she went over her own discovery of Charles's activities. It was all very quickly done, when you consider the content of it, she told it so tersely, ran with such swift, clean paces to her point. And this was not surprising, for she had thought of it unbrokenly in every minute of leisure her mind had; indeed, even when her outward attention was elsewhere, a deep undercurrent beat on preoccupied with this damning evidence. Norris never



ceased looking at her, because her eyes were on his, commanding, insisting that he take in what she brought him, fit it into his own testimony and let them decide together what fabric they could make of it. At the end she faltered, as if breath failed her. But it would not have failed, he knew, if there had been more to say. She could key herself up to any task and remain at the point of tension until it should be done.

"That's all," she said faintly. "That is really all."

Meantime Jessie, not looking up, sat folding compresses without a false motion of her weaving hands. Only her cheeks were scarlet, and Norris, glancing at her now, wondered whether it was with compassion for Helen or anger against Charles and so perhaps distaste for all the Tracys. As for him, he was entirely at a loss for anything to say. No palliatives here, no hollow consolations. She would, he read in every line of her tense figure, choose with him the Roman way. He got up, took her hand, kissed it and then sat down again.

"Well, Helen," he said, at length, "doesn't it make you the more prepared for what I've suggested? If this comes out — and it's bound to, you know — we can't shield him; we mustn't. If he is accused and arrested, you'd better be as far off as possible. I wish I could send his mother away from every sight and sound of it. But I can't. She'll have to meet it when it comes. And she'll bear it, too. Only I wish she could be saved. But you can, my dear. You can be saved. Now here are Jessie and I trying to do it. You let us save you, Helen."

"Yes," said Jessie, a breathless word. She stopped folding now and leaned forward, looking at Helen across the table, all passionate pleading. "It's the way, Nell, the only way."



Helen smiled a little sadly, regretfully for them, because they must be disappointed.

"No," she said. "I can't do it. If he's going to be disgraced—and punished—I must go back to him."

"Go back to him!"

They both echoed it in sharp interrogation, Norris with amazement and Jessie in complete rebuttal. But Helen, whose tension seemed to relax as theirs tightened, answered in a perfectly matter of fact calm:

"I must certainly go back. That is, if he's got this to go through."

Jessie spoke hotly from the keenness of her disappointment:

"Perhaps he won't want you to go back. There's Mrs. Davenport. We'd better not forget that."

Then, as she had said it, she realized the cruelty of it and flushed the deeper at what she named inwardly her own brutality. But Helen did not blench. How should Jessie know how far was this drear journey from the old time dancing on the lighted path of love, how far from forgiveness, from justice how immeasurably far? But if he had got to accept the supreme suffering of his life in the nemesis that was stalking him, he would need company in the dark way, the touch of the hand that had been used to serving him, the eyes that saw all his waywardness now but saw it without anger.

"I think," she said, "—I am sure—I should have to go back."

It was Norris who also saw she would be constrained to, and he came to it through two channels of knowledge which reënforced each other and made the solid image, as the eyes bring vision to the brain. Through Emily,

first, he understood it, because this, he knew, was exactly what Emily would have done if he had cast her off and again needed her supremely. Emily would be there. And again from another angle he saw it, because he was accustomed to considering the souls of men and setting them down for other men to read about. How foolish he had been to think he could move a woman from her sworn devotion.

"I don't think, dear," he said, trying to be fatherly in counsel and wishing tremendously for grandsir to take the case, "I'd make up my mind about that just yet. As Jessie says, there is a complication. And it may not be a very serious complication — that is, not big emotions, you know, not noble nor even very much to be turned out for — but you might find yourself up against something pretty tawdry. And that would hurt you — disproportionately to the good you'd do — and we don't want you to go through any such thing as that, Jessie and I don't. Do we, Jessie?"

Jessie shook her head, voicelessly troubled, and Norris, feeling miserably that he hadn't been adequate, that a part had been set him in a turbulent drama and he had boggled it, got up to go.

"At least," he said, "you won't make any move till I tell you — well, till I tell you there's a crisis?"

"You mean," said Helen clearly, "when Charles is to be arrested you'll tell me."

He hesitated.

"Yes," he said then, seeing it would be impossible to put her off except to some impetuous action of her own, "I'll tell you. At least, I think I will."

"And she'll go to him," said Jessie, out of her irrepressible aversion to the whole thing. "Helen, you'll

mix yourself up in a scandal, and what will be the good, to him or anybody?"

Helen had risen and stood facing them; in every motion and every line of argument they were ranged against her, yet somehow, Jessie felt hotly, she had put them in the wrong. Their rash sympathy had not brought them nearer. It was setting them further away. The bond was tightening that still held her in the sworn fealty of family life. Now she spoke with a dignity they found not so much admonitory as inherent in the gravity of her task:

"If men are coming into his house to take him away, they mustn't find him alone. I must be there with him."

Jessie, pushed away out of the sacred circle where husband and wife stood in that mystery of a defensive tie, flamed up in jealous anger and again said what she would not:

"And Mrs. Davenport? What if they find her there, too?"

"She will have to go," said Helen quietly. "Or she can stay: for that I can't control. But I shall be there too."

All the powers of righteous law might have been behind her, upholding the sanctities of the home her husband had defiled. Norris was abashed before her.

"Well, my dear," he said, and felt he said it weakly, "don't do anything rash. And remember this is between us three. That I insist on."

He got out of the apartment and went down the stairs feeling not like a Roman father but an ineffectual person who had tried to do a delicate job and muddled it irretrievably. As he went along the street a man behind overtook him and fell into step. It was Cross. Norris

looked around, gave him a nod and asked, he was afraid ungraciously, for he didn't want to encounter any other aspect of the puzzle until he had got back the self-respect lost by his ineptitude:

"Well? Anything more?"

"I've been waiting for you," Cross replied. "I want to know what madam says."

There was no serving man's deference about him now. He was on a job, though of his own appointing, and he spoke and acted with the decision fitted to it. Norris gave a brief moment to wonder that he could admit him to discussion of his son's most intimate affairs. Yet he felt no distaste for Cross. They both seemed to be in a miserable coil together, and Cross was the honest man who was as likely to help them all out as tie the tangle tighter. Social barriers had fallen, as they were falling in the ranks that fought Over There. In the forest fire, hereditary foes were taking together to the stream.

"Waiting for me?" said Norris. "Am I being shadowed, too?" He said it humorously, as he felt, though grimly.

"I knew you'd go to see madam this morning," said Cross simply. "How about France?"

Norris laughed, a little outburst of perfunctory amusement over his accounting to Cross for family decisions.

"Go? She won't," said he succinctly. "Moreover she asked me what was likely to happen, proved to me she knew as much about her husband's activities as I did, and says if he gets into trouble she'll go back to him and see him through."

"No!" shouted Cross, so explosively that a woman, passing them, looked round at him. But he at once recovered himself. "Then," he said, "he mustn't get into trouble — not yet."

He stopped abruptly, touched his hat, and went his way.

Helen left alone with her sister, turned to Jessie in a soft tenderness because she understood the girl's tempestuous mind.

"Jessie," she said, as if she begged forgiveness, "O Jess!"

Jessie's anger had gone, but the hurt of it was not. She began to cry, and Helen, who had not seen her so undone for years, was beside herself with alarm and misery. She knelt by her, put her arms about the rocking figure and solaced herself with inarticulate sounds of comfort. And Jessie, though full of her own grief, was remorseful, too.

"I behaved dreadfully," she said, at last, when her sobs had come down to rending breaths. "But how can you, Nell, oh, how can you? how can you think of such a thing?"

Helen spoke once only in answer to this. Indeed it hardly seemed to her wise, even in her pity, to speak at all, because she must maintain her point.

"You don't quite see, Jess. When you're married, you'll understand."

Jessie's sobs ceased at the strange reminiscent shock of it. That was, she thought, what John's mother had said to him. She put it away in her mind, to think over.

"But not yet, Nell, not yet," she allowed herself to say. "Don't even think of it yet."

### XXX

THAT afternoon, just as the dusk was falling and the lights blooming out in it like gay encouraging signals to say another sort of day had begun, John, crossing the Common, met Helen, walking fast. He was much pleased. She would let him turn about with her and they would walk together, only that pace of hers would have to be slackened for his infirmity. But she gave him a look, a call, a wave of the hand — a wave of dismissal and farewell, he felt it to be — and she was past him and flying on. Something in her face, too, was tragic like that hurrying pace. He went along slowly, thinking her over, the meaning of her look and, because he must know, rang the bell of her apartment to be told Jessie was at home. And here the tragedy was duplicated, so far as what was Helen could be repeated in Jessie. She was by the window, apparently watching the lights. It was a little ceremonial of twilight she and Helen loved. She did not turn as he came in, and he went to her, asking bluffly when he was half across the room:

“What’s the matter with her? I’ve just met her. Jessie, she’s down and out.”

He had reached her by the window, and now she turned to him and through the dusk he saw her pale, stained face. She had been crying again, Jessie who aimed at being so game she never cried. Her face gave him a double bewilderment, but for that instant he thought only of Helen.

"Where's she going anyway?" he pursued, "after dark, too. You said she shouldn't go out alone."

"Getting the air, she told me," said Jessie bitterly. "And running away from me. I wanted to go with her. She wouldn't let me. She's got to have a minute to get hold of herself."

"She didn't say that, not that way?"

"No, she's too sweet. But unhappy! O John, unhappy! I've been a beast."

"Rubbish," said John. "You two don't scrap."

"No. But she told me what she was going to do and I flared up. I'm a firebrand you know. If you didn't know it, I'll tell you now."

"What about?"

"She said, if he got into trouble—"

"He? Charles?"

"Yes. If he's disgraced she'll go back to him."

"By God! she sha'n't," cried John, and heard himself shout it without knowing what he said. And Jessie standing there piteous before him, and looking up at him as if she believed he could really bring about what would keep more tears from her lovely cheeks, he suddenly ceased thinking of Helen and thought of her. He put out his hand and touched her shoulder timidly, and then was frightened at the warmth of her skin under the soft lace.

"Don't," he said. "Don't cry."

"No," said Jessie, "I won't cry."

But she looked at him so miserably obedient and humble in her certainty of having done everything wrong that she went to his heart, and opened the door there and shut it after her and made it breathless from the warmth and sweetness of her. He put out both hands now and drew her toward him, and their cheeks touched and they stood



there silent, afraid and wildly happy. Then John said her name and turned her face to him and they kissed, and when she would have left him he caught her back, and instead of telling her what he felt about their mingled fear and rapture, asked it in a question instead:

“Jessie, do you suppose we are in love?”

She didn’t answer, but he felt her trembling and, with a queer sharp pang he hadn’t been prepared for, said to her, in words that came of themselves and that he would never have chosen, so childish were they:

“Have you been in love before?”

“No,” said Jessie. “Not ever. But,” she added jealously, “you have. There’s Helen.”

“Helen?”

“You think she’s the most beautiful — ever. You said so.”

“I love you,” said John, for sufficient answer, “nobody but you.” And having said it, half against his will, he felt a strange acquiescence, as if something tremendous in his life were over for good. “Helen?” he said again vaguely. Helen, in her perfections, seemed as far away as the stars, beautiful like them and yet remote, and this adoration in his arms was his,—the warmth of the sun, the shadow from its too fervent heat, sweet sleep in unison of breath, the earth that blessed and fed and beckoned you to its bosom for the last sleep of all. Helen would always be beauty unattainable and rare, but a little blurred now because they had together unwittingly pushed her so far away. “We must be awfully good to Helen,” he said.

“Good to her! good to Helen! That’s what we’re for.”

“She’ll be lonesome,” said John, “when we’re married — unless we see to it.”

She gave a little start at that. But it wasn’t surprise.

The truth is that she had got quite used to seeing herself married to John.

"We sha'n't be lonesome any more," said John. It suddenly seemed to him he had been a wandering light without her, and she asked him, laughing a little, tenderly, to make it banter:

"But you haven't been lonesome. You've had them all, your father and mother and grandsir —"

"It's different," said John. "They've forgotten — this. All but grandsir. I don't believe he forgets. Anyhow, we're not alone any more. We're a crowd."

"She mustn't go back to him," said Jessie. "We mustn't let her. And yet," she added, with a sudden access of blinding knowledge, "I should want to go back to you."

There was a good deal of this, strophe and answer of lyric love, and every word of it so significant that each put it down with the sharp stylus of remembrance for "the sessions of sweet silent thought," if ever they should be briefly separated. Or perhaps it was only the woman who meant to think back to it again. The man had no such tender thrift. He was all for squandering. Yet John had also the strangest sharp sensation of having come a long road, with Jessie at the end. And there was, beside the long road feeling, a sudden sense of stability, of waiting for things to come to pass. It was all different, the earth as he had grown used to looking on it. The tree was thinking down to its root, not forgetful of the old commerce with birds and wafting airs, but conscious of a deeper clutch in earth, of having to stay just here and shelter something. John found himself tremulously feeling along the chain of life, reaching his hand back to his father and grandsir and at the same time holding Jessie to him in the appointed bond. Was this the family? he didn't

ask himself that, but assuredly these were breathless recognitions he was meeting for the first time.

"That was the reason," he said tumultuously, "wasn't it? the reason we hated each other so at first. It's the same thing, in degree, anyway — love head on and crashing down on you. No wonder you're so scared and shocked it makes you mad."

Jessie did not answer this. She had never hated him.

"I'll tell you," he said, "— I haven't told anybody else — I see now why I didn't — it had to be you — I'm betting on Landis. I believe in him, same as Bones does. And if I'm not going to be lame, I shall be a decent enough fellow to marry. Besides, if the war lasts, don't you see I might get into it?"

Then they heard Helen's key and he said:

"I'm going to tell her. We must tell them all, Helen first and then grandsir."

"No," she said, this as Helen was opening the outer door, "you mustn't. Don't you see? — not while she's so sorry. She's lonesome. And we're a crowd."

The figure was an ecstasy. She saw them, John and herself, flying along, attended by all the laughing nymphs and graces, the dancing hours, life, life in abundance. Helen came in presently and found them in the dusk and excitedly glad, it seemed, to see her. She turned on the light and found the two faces full of an eager, tremulous emotion she had no difficulty in translating. They had been talking of her, she knew, and were planning how to be kind. And some of her misery fell away from her, and she gave Jessie's heart a lift by showing she had got hold of herself and meant to be the old Helen again.

## XXXI

AND now, what of Charles? while, to this little group with its eyes, for one reason or another, focused upon him, he loomed black and sinister because his deeds were evil, was he monstrous to himself? Did he see that he was stumbling about in the underworld and long, even though briefly, to escape and visit the clear air and sun? Not at all. He felt very much the same except, as he would have said, he was not quite fit. He was still drinking heavily, and his nerves were not of the sort to stand it. But a man who had his worries would have been of a titanic strength to abjure all artificial bracers in a life of what had become little less than a daily emergency. For he had worries from which not even Elsa could save him, and she was, he gave her credit, a trump, going with him step by step, warning him here and at another point buttressing him against the effects of his own tremors. While the loss of Captain Pfaff's papers had at first angered him chiefly through John's inexplicable connection with it, later it had clutched him in the grasp of a great anxiety. He might lie down at night with the worry drugged by some specific or other, but, when he woke, there it was under the coverlet with him, clawing at his heart. Always it was ready for him in that baleful moment between three and four when the body, feeling its mortality, is weak before the foe. He had lost the pride of self-control and carried his fear to Elsa like a child, and she fought it for him with such clear logic and indomitable will that he began to look upon her not only as his delight but the guardian of his peace.

One evening — and this was before the arrest of Adler — he went to her in a state of tremor that terrified the inmost heart of him. Was he going to have nerves at last, he asked himself, the sort he had seen in some fellows who had, in varying ways, done for themselves? He let himself in — he had a key to the apartment now — and felt at once a lull of momentary safety to hear the piano thundering out a noble flood of triumphant processionalists to some sort of victory — and what victory but his? Elsa came to him and gave herself to him passionately. He knew she would when he heard that emotional torrent from the keys, and he blessed the long dead wizards who moved her as he could not and turned her over to him for his comforting, they who needed comforting no more. And he led her to the window-seat, the lights low, his arms about her while he told her in a broken sentence how much he feared.

“But don’t you realize,” she said, “it’s your own brother that stole it? Do you think he’d inform on you? Not he. He’s a nice hot-headed lad, but as conventional as the rest of you. He won’t give up a Tracy, for he knows what it means — a Federal prison, at the least.”

Charles shook his head over the soft hair that touched his shoulder.

“You’re forgetting, too,” he said. “John didn’t have the bag. He was seen at the station without it. And he went back to Boston without it. For some unaccountable reason he lost it or he threw it away.”

“He couldn’t have lost it and he wouldn’t have thrown it away. He hid it somewhere and got it afterward. He knows that patch of woods as nobody else does. You told me so yourself.”

But this, as she said it, she did not believe. To her

also, the loss of the thing was a threatening mystery. Only, at this point, it was chiefly of importance that her man should keep his nerve. If he lost that, he was doomed, and she had the insight to see that the very force and charm of him were the effect of a make-up which, if it got jangled in this delicate business of playing the devil, might leave him stripped and shivering in a world he could no longer beguile nor fight.

"But concede it," she said, stroking his hand, the beautiful hand his mother loved. "Suppose it's turned over to the Department, what then? Are you the only one implicated?"

"No," said Charles, taking momentary heart again, in a violence of self-justification. "By God, I'm not!"

"I should say not. Think who is implicated. Run over the names in those papers. If you've forgotten, let me tell you."

She began, but he stopped her in so sharp a haste that she laughed and told him his nerves were getting the better of him. He was all on edge. Why shouldn't she name those names? Nobody could hear.

"No matter whether they can or not," he reminded her violently. "Don't repeat them, that's all."

"Well," said she, "I won't. But if you're hauled up, a few others are going to be, you know, and some very pretty edifices are going to totter. You won't go down alone, which means you won't go down at all."

He took heart and was ashamed of his apprehension. But whenever they talked on these things, it always came to this: his need of her. She was, he told her, his right hand. For now he had begun to forget Helen.

Elsa left him and brought her little chair near him, and, moved by the oneness of their aims and her soft sympathy,



he told her for the first time how he had been dogged by the grotesque follower in the cape and hat, and how the most disquieting part of it was the speed with which the creature got about from place to place. For he would see him at one street corner and, going on, meet him at another, and the fellow could not possibly have had time to get there. She was enormously interested.

"But what do you do?" she asked.

"Nothing. Walk along."

"Why don't you nab him and hand him over?"

"That's it. Even if I nabbed him—I couldn't have, so far—how do I dare to hand him over when I don't know what he's seen, what he knows?"

"Of course." She was grave again. "Stupid of me. I was nodding that time. But he may be just dotty. I don't quite see why it upsets you so."

"He isn't dotty," said Charles. "There's a purpose in it. And it doesn't upset me, in a way. That is, I'm not afraid of any personal violence. Only its queer. It's something deliberately planned. And when we're doing the things we are, don't you see we've got to look pretty sharp if there's anything different afoot?"

"Yes," said Elsa thoughtfully. "Yes." Her air quickened with the piquing interest of it. "Do you suppose," she said, "he's out here now?" She rose, pressed close against the darkened window and looked down. "No, there is no one there."

"Elsa," he said, when she came back to him, "have you ever thought what we're going to do if something is sprung on us? if we have to get out in a hurry?"

"No," she said lightly. But she had. She had even considered, as she sat there looking at his shadowy bulk in the dark, if, through expediency, through the loyalty



of partners in crime, she would take him with her. Not for love; she had known love, but the spring of it had died in her soft youth. But if she was to live, she had to sacrifice something for the manner of her living, perhaps pay heavily. And, remote as she seemed from any yearning for human ties, she did find it an ill thing to live alone. In that moment she made up her mind he might, in certain circumstances, go with her.

"What should you say," she began slowly, "to a job in Mexico?"

"Mexico?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"You've thought of it then? you realize we may have to get out of here?"

"I know things are going to happen mighty fast, from now on. Don't you?"

He knew it, but he did not answer her.

"War is to be declared in the spring."

"Yes," he confirmed her, "it's got to come."

"And of course, if nothing happens to shake us up, we stay right here on the job. Obstruction, that's what the *Voice*'ll stand for, crying up Germany, crying down the chances of the Allies. And ours — for by that time it'll mean our chances, too. And there'll be some nice little scientific jobs on hand. We've got to trip up the army, somehow. If not by keeping 'em downhearted, then by disease — and worse."

At that moment he thought he saw Helen before him in a light — not a bright light, but something soft, sufficient to disclose her — and she stood in front of the other woman and blotted her out. It is difficult to tell just how this similitude appeared to him. It was not of the opacity of mortal things nor was it a blazing vision, but it was gently

revealing, and it was Helen. He drew his breath sharply, almost like a cry, and Elsa came to him and laid her hand on his shoulder. And as she came the wraith of the other woman was gone, in some way he could not follow, and left him staring at the dusk where, it seemed now, she could not have been.

"What is it?" Elsa was asking.

He put up his hand and lifted hers from his shoulder.

"Don't," he said, "don't."

So she left him and sat down opposite and waited, and the first sign that he had got hold of himself again was that he gave a little moved laugh.

"Queer," he said, "queer. I don't believe I am very fit."

"You're jumpy," said she. "I'm not sure but a job out of the country would be the best thing for you."

But he wanted to ask her something that had not, until the wraith of Helen appeared in the room, ever occurred to him.

"Elsa," he said, "you're different from any other woman I ever saw."

She laughed, whole-heartedly it seemed, yet that might have been the adroitness of it.

"I should hope I did seem different," she said. "You've led me to suppose so."

He went on, not so much to her as absorbed in the puzzle of it.

"What you said just now, about the men, about disease, you know — I can't imagine a woman's saying a thing like that and not appearing to care."

"You know about those things. You know I know. They're commonplaces to us both." She was trying so to keep the desperate hardness of her purpose out of her

voice that one might have said she spoke without thought, carelessly. "We've been over these things together. Why, man, that's what we're doing. It's what we're hired to do."

"But," he repeated stupidly, "you don't seem to care."

Now she did laugh with unfeigned mirth.

"That is," she said, "you want me to play the old game, — keep on doing the things, but lament over them and be womanly while I do it. You'd like to believe I don't half realize the value of it all."

"I don't say that. Only — you're different."

"Well?" she said. She got up and stood in front of him, so close that he imagined he breathed in the warmth of her body and guessed at its trembling. "If I wasn't different, could I do it? If I hadn't shed a good many skins, should I be what I am?"

He cried out with delight in her and caught her to him. And she stayed, to persuade him by the warmth and fragrance of her. The picture she had, by one stroke, painted for him caught his fancy: the sinuous guile and evil of the world, shedding its skin to emerge more shining and more bright. His brain leaped to the fancy and threw him words, half remembered, to bedeck it, "That running brook of horror on the ground" — who had said that or something like it? But it was not horror to him, this vision of the snake of evil. It was the more enchanting in that it had escaped from bounds of dull virtues and denials, and slipped across the earth of Eden to coil in the inmost heart of man.

"A snake!" he cried. "That's what you are. Darling —" and there he paused because more words came rushing, and he remembered what had been said of all snake-women of all time — "serpent of old Nile."

She laughed. Yet underneath her laughter, she knew

she was not the strange exotic devil his senses found her, and that her passion of the moment was as premeditated as her plans. But at all costs he must be kept. However he had to hesitate or interrogate, whatever witch's broth of passion he might demand from her, he must not escape. Too much depended on him, his nerve, his calmness of discretion. At points, indeed, he was stupid. She had found it out. They had all discovered it in a measure, but too late, or they might not have trusted him entirely. But now he was inside the black circle, and there he must stay. He sat musing on her and the picture she had given him. Now he could account for her, the guile, the coldness and the weaving charm. She was not pure woman. She belonged to the other world of those who bewitched and held and poisoned, too, perhaps, under whose gliding length the herbs of ruth lay withered, against whom the gardens of life are defended, yet who reign there unseen. She was craft and power and swiftness, and if there was venom under her fangs it would never be for him. He was not even apprehensive now, though there was still the loss of the papers and the foolish menace of his grotesque follower. For whatever happened, the snake could glide by unseen ways and she would take him with her.

When he went home that night, he was not dogged, and that also steadied him. But on the way suddenly the strangeness of that vision of Helen came to him, as if the cold air brought her, and he walked past his door and on to hers and stood opposite, on the other side of the street, and looked up at its dark windows. He hardly knew why he did it. He most assuredly did not want the windows bright for him. The little snake which was Elsa was coiled up in what he would have called his heart. Only

the vision of Helen had been so unaccountable. But he dismissed it and went back home, and slept that night securely, with a curiously pleased sense of safety and possession now that he could think of the little snake.

Helen, in her bed, was not sleeping. She had gone there early because the strange things of her later life had come upon her as they did sometimes, in a dark, flying cloud, and she could not bear even Jessie's company. And there she had lain, hour after hour, calling upon her husband, whether his soul she did not know, but the inner, invisible part of him, as God saw it, beseeching him to leave the ways of darkness and return.

## XXXII

CHARLES was having respite from the pranks of his grotesque follower because Bailey, Finch and Brennan were simply too busy on another tack: enthusiastically busy, too, for they believed they had attained their end. And the result of their work reached him in a big package, due at this time. Charles came in — it was three days after Adler had been spirited away from Grasslands and he had heard no word of it — received the package from the blonde chatelaine with the smile she loved while she hopefully wondered if it were hers alone and went on to his room. His letters were on the desk, awaiting him, a neat pile with a telegram on top. He took off his hat and coat and opened the telegram, to stare, mutter a bewildered curse or two and stare again. It was from New York, from the Fritz he had left in charge at Grasslands, and it told him in guarded language that, since the gentleman staying at the house had disappeared, they two, the man and wife, had not felt easy and had left. The gentleman had disappeared: he sat with the paper in his hand dwelling on these four words. His man and woman had run away consistently enough, for they had just been paid. They were of no importance. But the gentleman had disappeared. He knew what that meant, the only thing it could mean. Adler had been taken and taken from Grasslands. Where did that leave him? He tore the telegram into bits, threw them into the basket and sat there holding down his quivering nerves. Slighter terrors stabbed at

him beside the greater one. The telegram, for instance: fools, to have sent that when they could have written him as well. Or they could have telephoned at once and he would have gone down to hear the evil tale.

Mechanically he tore open the package before him because the sanity of composure lay in doing something, and at the first cartoon, with its accompanying inscription, he did blench with something like horror. For this, he found, in the instant of turning them over, was another continued series, and it was, in verse, an epic story of the kidnapping of Adler. The artists had laid themselves out with a gaiety of resolve which had resulted in something so spirited, so audacious, that Charles, the newspaper instinct triumphing, for a moment, over his sick soul, saw the money value of the thing, and cursed them anew because he could not use it. There was Adler in the security of the room at Grasslands, with his pipe and his glass, and there was Adler leaving the door of Grasslands and the kidnappers ready to force him into the car. And one of them was Charles's follower in the cloak and hat. The other two were masked. That, Brennan concluded, added to their mystery. The face of Adler himself was half averted because Brennan, never having seen him, had to rely on Bailey for descriptive data; but the wry mouth was unmistakable and the enormous ear escaping from the shock of hair. There was the transfer of the prisoner from one car to another, on a lonely road, and his delivery to a frowning building where uniformed officials received him. Brennan had had to draw on fancy here, but the scene was right enough. It told the story. But what entirely floored Charles, like a blow in the face, was the figure in the cape and hat. So they had hatched up that job, the young devils. And Bailey, in his galloping verse,



told their story gaily. The three sleuths, he called them; and in another cartoon Brennan had drawn them standing in a line, grinning, and in another fling into a photographer's, each in his cape and hat. This last was labelled The Composite. So that was the photograph, still standing on his desk. It was a childish sort of farce, and he had let it move him. He brought his hand down on the pile of papers with a force that hurt it and left them undented. That was it, he thought, a symbol of the disproportioned waste and general devilishness of life. He had squandered his nerve on these three fools who in turn spent their talent and their energies in playing about like mountebanks, to whom the world itself, that gigantic market-place and battlefield, was itself a playground. And he had been moved by them. He had trembled lest the childish machinery they had set whirling about him was something to stretch out a claw and draw him in, or that a broken band from it would fly and strike him. He had been a fool. And yet had he? Wasn't the grotesque intent of them merely the index of a purpose? Were they like the Fool of the Fool's Revenge, playing the mountebank for desperate design? And mustn't he perhaps fear them the more, instead of less, in that their scheme looked light as air? for it might well be the air that fans a flame to fury. For here was the last cartoon of all: a galley, the oars idle, and in it the three in their fantastic garb and over them the explanatory legend, Kipling's "Will you never let us go?" Charles himself was the potentate, his robes heavy with embroidery, his crown a circlet rayed with gems. He was looking down upon them so arrogantly you actually heard the question issuing from his haughty mouth: "You threaten me?" From the lips of the cockiest, most impudent of them, flew the answer:

"Yes. Who was hiding Adler?" This figure was a masterpiece. Brennan, in an amazing line or two, had done Bailey to the life.

That was it: they were threatening him, bidding him take heed, since they knew this one, at least, of his activities. They had, by some chance, ill-starred for him, picked up a crucial fact. It was in their possession, to be sold or given away; but first of all to be offered him to buy their freedom. And while he was staring that certainty in the face the blonde chatelaine asked from the next room if Mr. Tracy were there. Mr. Bailey was calling. Charles answered on the instant:

"Mr. Tracy is not here at the moment. Ask Mr. Bailey to wait while we look him up."

He gathered the cartoons and verse together and made them into a neat bundle, stopping only to swear at the knotted tape, throw it away and tie them up with string. Then he slipped the package under his letters, laid the pile on the top of his desk and called up the next room. Mr. Tracy had been found and Mr. Bailey might come in. And when Bailey opened the door, Charles was whistling in a musical undertone and reaching for his letters. These he proceeded to open as they talked.

"Hullo," said he, with the utmost cheerfulness. "I hoped you'd be in. Got me some stuff?"

Bailey, when he stepped into the room, had looked highly excited. He knew it by the feelings within him and could not, hard as he pressed himself, assume a more specious calm. His pink cheeks were red and his mouth wore an interrogatory smile. "Queer state of things, isn't it?" This was what his look said. "Well, we've got to talk it out together, and it'll be queerer when we're through." But when he found Charles glancing at him

so casually and so kindly, and opening letters with a rapid hand, he did feel suddenly crestfallen, and looked that also, giving Charles a quick satisfaction because it assured him of being, momentarily at least, on top.

"No," said Bailey, fumbling with the doubt of the situation. "The fact is, I left our stuff last night after you had gone."

"Odd," said Charles. "I haven't seen it."

"That's it," said Bailey, still more depressed. For if Charles had not read their argument, then the play could not be played out as he had planned. He couldn't spring the climax of the third act because the necessary elucidations hadn't led up to it. "That's it, on the top of your desk."

He ventured to pull it forward to assure himself also. But at the moment of touching it, his face changed. The old imps, veiled for a moment, were again dancing in his eyes. He was approaching his third act after all.

"Ah, to be sure," said Charles. "Well, I won't stop to open them now. They're up to the same standard, I've no doubt. You always are, you fellows. How do you manage it? Strike twelve every time?"

"Spectacular of us," said Bailey, with a grin. "No way to tell folks the time of day though. And that's really what we're after. That's what I'm after now, Mr. Tracy. We want to make a new deal. Begin over, strike one."

Charles was meeting him in sympathetic interest. Almost, if Bailey had not known how inevitably the steps were leading to that third act — and he was ringing up the curtain now — he would have thought Charles was the most ingenuous and the kindest of men.

"The fact is," he said, — and this was the predestined

entrance upon the third act. After this there would be no returning — “we want to tear up our contracts with you and make a new deal.”

“You?” said Charles, painfully surprised, it seemed. “All of you?”

“Yes. Brennan and Finch, too. I’m spokesman. I don’t know why. They always put their dirty work on me. Yes, we want to tear up our contracts and get out. We’ve no reason to give. We just want to, that’s all.”

“No reason?” asked Charles, still sympathetically, and evidently looking chiefly at their side. “And why the deuce do you want to do a thing you’ve no reason for?”

“That’s it,” said Bailey airily. “I suppose we’re queer Dicks; but that’s the way we are. Erratic, you know. Temperament. We just want to slip out of this thing and work on our own. Of course if our stuff suited you we’d love to submit it: but not regularly, not as a matter of necessity.”

Charles had been looking at him in pained and benevolent interest. Now he turned his eyes upon his desk and sat drumming noiselessly with one hand and apparently thinking hard. Bailey, in reporting the interview to the others, confessed he never had felt more equably suspended in the air between the beetling heights of two alternatives. On the one side was the green height of freedom, if Charles could incredibly be persuaded to let them go. On the other loomed the steely cliff of denial, and between lay the unplumbed abyss of Charles’s rage. Over this the exceedingly tenuous cord of Charles’s fictitious composure held him, and if it broke, in what cranny would his bones be found bleaching by Finch and Brennan when they came to hunt him up? And after all he wasn’t sure Charles had seen the explanatory cartoons. He had only guessed

it, and the way might not have been prepared. But Charles looked suddenly up with his flashing smile, that sudden lighting of his face which was always unexpected enough to make you catch your breath, it had such beauty.

“Bailey,” he said, “I’m going to be square with you. I’m awfully sorry. I’m — I’m hurt, if that isn’t too soft a way to put it. I thought we should work in together and go on working and — but no matter. Of course, if you want to go you must.”

Bailey said afterward to the boys that Charles was so convincing he wondered, for the instant, whether they did want to go, whether Adler’s abduction and the apostasy of the *Voice* were not idle dreams he had fished out of his own silly fancy. He had to hold on to himself, he said. He had to put wax in his ears to shut out the persuasions of the siren Charles. Brennan made a big drawing of it, as they listened, Charles sitting on a rock, doing the siren act, fitted out with harp and floating tresses and the sea waves dashing at his feet. But Bailey did shut up his mind and pass this moment chiefly, after the first glance at such ingenuous kindliness, by not looking at Charles. He plunged into his pocket and produced the contracts.

“Here they are,” said he, in breathless dread of himself, “the three of them. I’m commissioned, with your leave, to tear ’em up.”

“Hm! hm!” Charles hummed, not unmusically, to himself, as if, though the decisive word had been uttered, he were still sadly thoughtful. He went to the safe, opened it, sought a moment, again considering, put his hand on a packet of papers, withdrew three and came back with them to the desk. He spread them out, face uppermost, one upon the other.

"There you are," he said.

Bailey now could hardly believe in his good luck.

"Shall I tear up these?" he asked.

Charles gave the ones on his desk a little flip toward him.

"All of them," he said, still regretfully. "The whole business, if that's what you want."

And though his forbearance and courtesy were somehow making Bailey ashamed of himself and inclined to get angry, in self-defense, because he was ashamed, he fell upon the papers and tore right and left. When they were in inconsiderable pieces, he scooped up what had fallen on the desk and carried them in his hands to the basket, and nothing was left.

"There, by George!" said he. "Mr. Tracy, I'm awfully obliged to you." He could hardly help saying instead: "It's awfully decent of you." He had to keep reminding himself: "But he is pro-German and we've caught him and pushed him and bullied him and he can't help himself."

Yet such is the force of a faultless behavior that he knew Charles was, to all seeming, coming out on top.

"I want you to be suited," said Charles bluffly. "Heavens, man! you don't suppose I'd keep you if you don't choose to stay?"

He held out his hand.

But Bailey, suddenly looking in his eyes, saw something there, something his own eye told him to match up with the specious words, if he really was going to understand Charles. And this was, he told the boys, that Charles was really "mad as ten devils." So he ignored the hand which, in the light of that glance, suddenly looked to him the hand of one who was not an honest man, and went away without a word.



Charles stood perfectly still until Bailey had had time to cross the outer office; then he drew a quick breath, and then another. It was not as if he were inviting them, but the breaths had him in their power and were shaking him. He stepped to the side of the room where there was a moderately heavy chair, lifted it and threw it so that it met its doom against the wall and lay shattered, one leg gone. Then he returned to his desk, and was absorbedly busy when the chatelaine knocked and entered. She was interrogative and wild-eyed.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Tracy," she said. "You haven't hurt yourself?"

"No," said Charles pleasantly. "What made you think I had?"

"I heard a noise," said she, and ended blankly, "Why, just look at that chair!"

"It fell," said Charles, still pleasantly. "No, there wasn't any noise, not in here. Probably in the street."

That night, when Bailey, Finch and Brennan were celebrating their new freedom over the excellent rarebit Bailey served in his attic room, and the rejoicings were not loud but almost prayerfully subdued, life seemed a thing of such grotesque complexity, Brennan remembered.

"But you said," he remarked, "Tracy told you he hadn't opened our stuff and then you knew he had."

"I saw the string," said Bailey. "Mine was a nice green tape and that was all in a mess in the basket. I saw it. And he'd tied 'em up again with rough manila, and there was a bit of that in the basket, too."

"But it might not have been he," said Finch. "It might have been that peroxide Peri at the gate."

"Yes," said Bailey modestly. "Only it wasn't, that's all."



### XXXIII

JOHN, in spite of the looming anxiety which was Charles and the unbelievable disaster of Helen's going back to him, found himself night and day traveling a new road where Jessie was the only other wayfarer. The most curious thing had happened to them in their stumbling into this lonely, superlatively lovely road. It seemed like a road other people had known, each once upon a time, and then had lost either because they didn't stay wise enough to keep it or never had guessed, when they had it, how lucky they were and also how easy it was to miss a guidepost here and there. It was entirely different from every other road. The sun upon it was brighter and the shade more delicately green. The leaves trembled, in a wonderful way, and the fruits that dangled low for comfort and high for daring, were all honeyed fragrance and melting to the taste. John and Jessie had entered on the entrancing pastime of going on and on, and were certain to go on forever, because they knew exactly how lucky they were; they had been clever enough to detect at once the greatest beauty about the road, which was that it had no end. And its name was love.

When John could intermit wondering about Jessie, he wondered about himself. He recognized himself, in this glass of his reflections, as different. Every step on the road took him forward into a new solicitude, a new authority. He had become potentially the head of a family, and light, full flood, seemed to be pouring in on him.

The first thing he did by way of confirming this freedom of his bondage, was to disobey Jessie, with an unquestioning assumption that he knew what was best for them, as travellers on the enchanted road, and go in to tell grandsir all about it. He chose the early evening when grandsir was less likely to be tired, and because it was news not so well suited to the light of day. The stars were in it, and dusk and sunset clouds and all the mysteries, and night herself: for when you came to mysteries, she was the mother of them. By day, John had learned, you were likely to be misled by your own conceit; but when you looked up at the stars or the veil that covered them, you caught just an echo of the song the morning stars sang together and you might croak a note or two yourself. John was looking now with the poet's eye, and his mother, noting the exalted brilliance of his face, thought back to the hope Doctor Landis had given him and concluded, in one of her tender remorse, that perhaps none of them, well as they thought they knew it, had ever really entered into John's feeling about his infirmity.

This evening he found grandsir reading at his table.

"One of dad's books!" John remarked, in extreme surprise, when grandsir had closed it and told him to sit down. "Grandsir, you don't read 'em all, do you?"

"Why, yes," said grandsir. He rose and, helping himself a part of the way by one hand on the table, came round to the fire. "Of course I do."

"Well, you know," said John, with the frankness of his daytime manner, "they're rotten books."

Grandsir couldn't afford to answer that. He had no particular claim, he thought, on the intellectual life. There were a few things he did know, these not as a critic but, he quoted, by the light of natur'. He contented him-

self now with a quotation Norris was fond of using at exigencies when middle-age found itself at a discount:

“O gentle boy with smooth white brow,  
I would I were cocksure as thou!”

“Oh, that’s all right,” said John, who had heard it before. “My brow ain’t so very smooth and it ain’t so very white — not so you’d notice it — but they are rotten books, and don’t you forget it.”

“Well,” said grandsir, “I suppose there are fashions in books. These may not suit your particular period. You don’t need to read ’em. But when you’re as old as I am, maybe you’ll like to run ’em over and find out for yourself just what sort of a chap your father was. Maybe you will. I don’t know.”

“You see,” said John, still in his capacity of critic, “they’re sort of mid-Victorian.”

“It wasn’t a bad thing to be mid-Victorian,” said grandsir tolerantly. But what was he tolerant of, mid-Victorianism or John?

“No! oh, no! There were some mighty fine old duffers along there; but just now they seem terrible thin.”

“I suppose,” said grandsir, “the reason I read ’em is chiefly because I want to understand my son’s mind. I like to get inside it and see it work. It shows me what sort of a son I’ve got.”

“Oh, dad’s all right,” said John, his own mind giving a flirt now and flying off to Jessie. “Only, that’s just it. He gets his characters out of his mind. They’re all dad himself, one way or another, dad as a father, as a grandfather, as a college girl, a plumber, a teetotaler. They don’t rise and walk, grandsir. They just plain don’t. And they’re as much you and me as they are dad.

Don't you know we three talk alike and think alike? We are alike. And so are dad's characters. They're a kind of a Tracy exhibit."

"I've got something in my desk I should like to show you." Grandsir spoke with deliberation, as if he were debating on the wisdom of what he felt moved to do. "It's something your father's been at work on lately, not, you'll see, for publication, but because he's been having a good many worries, and I have an idea he thought he could work out of 'em better if he put certain things down on paper. You needn't tell him I showed it to you. The only reason he brought it to me was because we'd both been fretting over the same thing. Maybe he thought it might help me a little, too. You go to my right hand little drawer there. It's on top."

John went to the drawer and came back with a thickish manuscript.

"Read it," said grandsir. "Run through it now and I'll shut my eyes and think about it. I know it pretty well by heart. Then, when you've finished, you can tell me what you think. If you hear your father coming, just chuck it back in the drawer. I have an idea he'd feel a little shy with you, more'n he would with me, anyway. You see I'm not intellectual."

"The Politician," said John.

Then he began to run over it to himself, in his quick habit of taking in a page at a gulp, the practised reader's way. Grandsir appeared to fall into what he called a sog, and John felt himself entirely alone with the paper. But presently so vividly did the thing impress him that he wondered if it were the sequence of words he was absorbed in or his father himself. And suddenly he felt young and foolish and, as it were, bereft, in the certainty that he

had never known his father at all. When he came to the last page he drew a deep breath and, as if he had been waiting for it, grandsir's eyes came open with a blink.

"Look here," said John, "this is perfectly ripping, you know. I didn't think he had it in him."

"Just put it back in the drawer," said grandsir, "in case he comes in."

When John went back with it, he stood there, rereading a page or two; but he finally laid it in and shut the drawer upon it.

"Well," said grandsir, when he came back to the fire — and grandsir was rather maliciously pleased to see how pale John looked, with brilliant eyes, as if he had been startled out of his carelessness and his calm — "measures up to the modern standard all right?"

"Oh, it's ripping," said John again. "It's one of the great papers on public events, the kind big men used to write, and professors tell us to read and mostly we don't."

"Not especially mid-Victorian?"

"O grandsir," said John, "don't you tell me I'm a chump. English like that and straight thinking like that isn't then or now. It just belongs to all time, and you know it does. You think I'm more or less of a fool and you're trying to get a rise out of me."

"No," said grandsir, "not that. I never've tried to do any moral kindergartening with you. Besides, you're a man now like the rest of us. But I've been thinking a good deal about your father lately, and I rather wanted you to think about him, too. You see, John, since the war begun, your father's seemed to me what I call the best sort of an American."

John nodded. He would not let himself speak though he felt the words flooding, he was so afraid grandsir would

stop. But grandsir was absorbed now in saying at least a little of what he had to say — and there was a great deal of it, more than was likely ever to be said — and he went on.

“You see your father’s had the life of ’most any prosperous American. I made money enough for all of you and I guess there’s enough to last till the proletariat comes in and chops off your heads. The heads of your children, rather. I put it about then.”

John gave a start in his chair and looked up at grandsir, the red flooding his face. His children! did grandsir know about Jessie? No, grandsir was only finding a figure of speech, and was going on, absorbed in his manner of putting it.

“So your father could write just the way he wanted to. If he’d been poorer, maybe he could have written better. I don’t know. That’s for you clever heads to find out. And your father expected to grow old like me — only let’s hope he wouldn’t have stiffened up in this devilish way — and perhaps go abroad again and then settle down in the chimney corner and read books, and be kind of sorry he hadn’t written better ones of his own, but not care so much about it after all — because I guess life shows you in the end it isn’t any more important to write books than it is to do some other things — and then the war came. John, you must see how the war’s changed things.”

John nodded, but in his heart he remorsefully knew he had not suspected it had changed things for father, who was too old to do anything of consequence and, like the old, accepted it and didn’t think about it.

“If your father had been twenty years younger,” said grandsir, “he’d have been in it; or, being as old as he is



now, if he'd lived any sort of public life — politics, you know — he'd be in it now, hammer and tongs. That's what I call the American of it. There are hundreds of mild sort of men like your father that, when such a call comes, just rise and act. And if the call comes for him, he'll rise and act, too, and you won't know him, John. And then'll be your time to stand by him and realize what kind of a chap your father is."

John was staring at him now from under frowning brows, and he asked:

"You mean something, grandsir. What are you telling me all this for, if you don't mean something by it? What's he going to do?"

"I want you," said grandsir again, "to understand what sort of a man your father is. He's head of the family, and if anything comes up to throw us on our beam ends, we've got to let him stay at the helm and take our orders from him. That's all."

That, John knew, from old experience, was the limit of what he should get out of him. But as he sat there, some queer intelligence began to come alive in him, a sentiency that crept along his body, like apprehension, and ended in his brain. And there it told him something that turned him sick with a spiritual nausea, a revolt against the incredible thing his mind had just presented to him. It had been, the minute before, a point of honor not to interrogate grandsir further, after the finality of those last words. But the question came rushing from his lips because it was so horrible a visitant within him he could not entertain it further.

"Grandsir, did he mean Charles? The Politician — is it Charles?"

Grandsir sat a moment in silence. Then he shifted



himself carefully in his chair and answered, with a set indifference:

"The question never came up between us. I didn't ask him."

"And," John wondered if he wanted to add, "you should have copied our reticence and not have asked me."

But John felt he could not endure within him the burning of those doubts. He had to push on.

"It sounds to me—I didn't think of it when I read it, but that's because it's so abstract—it's like a big student's thinking out things in his study, Milton's prose, you know, Edmund Burke—it sounds like the things I believe about Charles. Only I couldn't have put 'em so."

"You've said a good deal yourself about Charles, one time and another," said grandsir, with a sad humor.

"Yes, I've ripped out things. But I haven't said 'em like this. I shouldn't know how."

"No," said grandsir, reaching, although he was the last to know it, the topmost peak of criticism. "That's because writing like this comes out of living, and your father has lived that way."

"But what's he going to do with it?" John pursued, branching off. "If it's Charles, what's he going to do?"

"Burn it, I should think," said grandsir. "Though he hasn't said so."

"Burn it? not on your life. I tell you it's great prose."

"But if it's Charles, could he bear to do anything else? Yes, it's got to be burned in the end,—that is, if it's Charles."

"What d'he write it for then?"

"He didn't tell me," said grandsir. "But I should guess a man that had the habit of writing might feel, if

he was up against something big — and awful, too — he might take that way of clarifying his mind."

"Grandsir," said John, "is dad up against something big? and is it Charles?"

"You mustn't ask me," said grandsir. "And you mustn't ask him. Only, you stand by. That's what you and I've got to do, you because you're young and I because I'm old."

John sat, aghast, looking into the fire, the warm reality of Jessie chased, for the moment, out of his mind.

"I'd like," he said, "to read one paragraph again, the one about his being an outlaw."

"Yes," said grandsir, "read it. You might read it to me."

"'He is,'" the paragraph ran, "'an outlaw from his kind, because he has repudiated the laws whereby his kind has risen from ravening slaughter to the rights of men. He does not share in the honorable give and take of common life, the plain rules humanity has brought with it, step by toiling step, out of primeval slime. He takes, and offers no just equivalent. He preys upon the world. And, being an outlaw, he is like all his type in that he shifts his hiding places. He is in one covert of vantage to-day and another to-morrow. You cannot track him down on the moors of violence because, by the time you have wind of him there, he had taken himself to the woods of sophistry. Thread the woods after him, to persuade him back to the tents of men, and he is away upon the high road to the devil, assaulting a child for a penny and bribing a beggar for his vote. He is the enemy of man, and the just consensus of mankind has decreed that enemies of mankind shall die.'"

"That isn't the best paragraph," said John, "the

style of it, I mean. But it's the one that sounds like Charles."

Grandsir seemed to have sunk into a sort of waking doze. It was these withdrawals that sometimes brought John up with a jerk and made him tell himself that perhaps, in the end, grandsir would have to give up to being old.

"But you," grandsir was saying murmurously, "you remember."

"Remember what, grandsir?" John asked, in the stillest voice, not to jar him into a wakefulness he might be trying to escape. But grandsir did come broad awake.

"Remember?" he repeated. "Was that what I was saying? Well, remember for one thing it's all a mystery, a complete mystery. You can't fathom it. You can't break the darkness with a star. Who said that? was it your father? But even if you've got the star on the job, you don't know what the star itself means. There's only one thing we know for certain—and that is, you must be as decent as you can and in the way other decent fellows have marked out for you."

John had an instant's revulsion here. He couldn't help feeling this solemn talk was more or less like a funeral march while Jessie and he were flying along with the loves and graces on their springtime road. He was hearing the bugles of war and the flute of Pan in pure accord, and grandsir was bringing in an undertone of muffled drums.

"Everything's queer now," he grumbled. "Everybody's so awful solemn."

"Well," said grandsir, brightening up, "there's no more occasion for being solemn than there has been for the last twenty years or so. We ought to have been solemn all through, when things were brewing. But now the thing's come to a head and drenched the world—oh, I

guess you're rather solemn yourself, old man, about the way things are going. When you put your pen to paper, you send my temperature down into my boots."

John conceded the general murkiness because he had to, but it wasn't blotting out that light over the upland plain where the enchanted road ran and the flying hours kept tryst with him. Bones came in, and suddenly realizing how tired grandsir was and how he turned to Bones with an evident relief, John left him and went down to his own room, meeting Finch, who had just been admitted and was sent up there by Emily: she liked the boys to have free access to the house. It was on the landing of John's floor they met, and he was at once caught by Finch's face, its red suffused with a deeper flush, his eyes sharp with excitement behind his spectacles.

"What's up?" inquired John. It must, he knew, have been the wildly unexpected so to move him.

"Come on into your room," said Finch, getting in before him. "No, don't turn on the light. Come here to the window. Do you see that chap down there knocking out his pipe? He's shadowing you."

"Me?" said John, entirely taken aback. "What for?"

"Search me. You ask Bailey. Anyhow it's so. Now you watch and see what happens to him."

They stood there perhaps five minutes. In that time the fellow walked up the street a little way, came briskly back, dropped something and stooped to pick it up, these being the fussy activities of a man clumsily killing time. And while he stood there, a fantastic figure in a cloak and queerest hat ran lightly round the corner, dropped a large package at his feet, with such accuracy that it lay against his legs, tapped him on the shoulder and ran as lightly away. He came now, this grotesque figure, across

the street, and up the Tracy steps, and immediately the door bell sounded.

"What the deuce—" John began, but Finch interrupted him, his voice bubbling with a laugh.

"Watch him," he said. "Just watch him. O Lord! I do hope he carries it away. That's the trouble with our larks. If they don't turn out just so they're damned foolishness."

The fellow did carry it away. First he stepped back and, failing its support against his legs, it fell flat before him. He stirred it with his foot, picked it up, examined it closely, stood a moment in evident hesitation and then made off with it at a sturdy pace. John was about putting his question again, but there was a hoot of laughter behind him, and Finch remarked:

"Now we could do with a little light," and turned it on.

There was Bailey, his hat still on and again hooting, the laugh as funny as his hat.

"If I haven't scared your darling mother into forbidding me the house, it's because she's too used to us to be scared at anything. First the maid lets me in and hollers, and your mother appears from somewhere. And does she holler? Not she. She says, 'John's in his room. You can go right up.' I didn't take off my hat. I wanted her to see me in my beauty. John, if you haven't a brandy bottle in the bed, like Becky, give me something out of the faucet. I have this night lighted such a candle in Boston—you'll see."

He threw himself in a chair and stuck his legs out and now, taking his hat off, was, with his disordered wig, so funny a sight that John also sat because he felt wild laughter coming upon him and was undone. Finch

laughed, too, but he had not only seen the dress before but worn one like it.

"He took it, didn't he?" asked Finch. "Walked right off with it like a little lamb with a tuft of grass. Would you believe he'd have been such a fool? Weren't you surprised?"

"I believe you," said Bailey. "I expected him to throw back the lapel of his coat and show me a badge as big as a full moon and then nab me. So I just squawked 'Tag!' and got out."

"But what — what —" spluttered John, "what's on anyway, and if it's any such fool thing as it looks, why didn't you let me in?"

"Why," said Bailey, adopting the fairy tale tone, "you must know — and once upon a time — Brennan and Finch and I hired us three costumes precisely alike, so that, being three, we could appear in three places almost at once and give a dizzying impression of there being but one of us with supernatural powers of locomotion. And we've played our little game and won, hands down, and being about to return our costumes to the Semitic gentleman who loaned them to us, we thought we could afford to keep one back and send it to a friend. We thought, all things considered, we'd get enough out of it to pay us. So we does it up in a nice box and labels it large and plain and leans it up against this Johnnie's legs to carry back to the one as hires him. Of course there were chances he'd leave it right there on the pavement, and walk off, and little Ned Bailey'd be like the other little boys that drop an April Fool in the thoroughfare and have to sneak back and pick it up themselves. But it all came out slick as a pin, and if there isn't balm in Gilead I don't know what there is there and Gilead's the prize vacuum of history."



“But who is the one as hires him?” inquired John.

“The one,” said Bailey modestly, “the box was addressed to.”

“And who’s that?”

“Mr. Charles Tracy. It’s a kind of a souvenir, old boy, for we’re greatly indebted to your Charles, and we wanted to do the handsome thing by him, give him a testimonial, a loving cup or a sunburst or an antique wig and hat.”

“What’s he done for you?” inquired John.

But he spoke with some inward apprehension. His talk with grandsir had made him sensitive to the atmosphere about Charles.

“Oh,” said Bailey, airily, “he’s simply met us and he is ours. He’s given us back our contracts and they’re torn into forty million pieces; and now, old son, we’re ready to pitch in and do some of the things we planned before we fell into the hands of the excellent Charles.”

“He let you break your contracts?” said John slowly. He was too awed by this development in the direction of Charles to give his mind at once to its relief over getting his men back again out of bondage. “What made him? There’s something in the background you don’t know — or haven’t told.”

“What made him?” said Bailey. “I made him. I asked him, that’s all, and he said yes. Your Charles has his points.”

That was all he would say. He owned they had harried Charles, worried him, no doubt, by the constant attention of their buffoonery; but of the probable criminal activities of Charles he had nothing to say. Bailey devoted a modest pæan to the way his recreant heart had behaved in this pursuit of Charles. He had run all over



the city, he said, like greased lightning. He had laughed himself faint. And however his heart had liked it, he was more and more convinced it was in the right place. Possibly he might enter for the next Marathon and, if he survived that, see if he could get Over There on the strength of it. Brennan came in presently and they sat down to one of their old conclaves and had a great time planning propaganda. John had, he told in some detail, done their work, too, while they had been serving out their sentence. And there was money to come. The mysterious donor was good for some hundreds more. Also — this came from Bailey who was as forgiving as the sun except in the matter of base politicians and Germans — there was a certainty that Niles had seen the light and was crawling back to them.

“And you,” said Bailey to John, “you’ve done it, old man. He says he could stand anybody’s arguments and sit up all night and answer ’em, and match ’em, text for text. But he can’t stand anybody’s being as clever as you’re being, and he’s got to pitch in with us and be clever, too. For he says you can’t be clever about pacifism. There’s something in it that turns your brains to nutmegs and your style to water,—and by George! won’t there be a team of us!”

## XXXIV

NORRIS lived now with a consciousness of Helen at his elbow. She was begging him to keep her in mind. Once by a note she did it, again, in a veiled way, by telephone. His unwilling and tentative promise she quietly asserted she considered binding. He must do nothing without telling her.

"What is it you are going to do?" Emily asked him once when he came away from the telephone. "Why don't you do it if she wants you to?"

Norris smiled a little sardonically over that, and wondered what Emily would say if she realized what it was Helen was urging him to do. Something about France, he told her, lying boldly. He could not remember a time when he had lied to her. She was so fair-minded and tolerant, you really didn't have to lie.

"The girls," he said, "both of them, want to go."

But instead of feeling himself on the road to a heroic task, he was chiefly irritated, wishing he could pack off the whole family to the other side of the globe until he found out what was to become of Charles, to whom, according to every tenet of family affection, he owed protection, not hostility. He thought he could have lived through the thing very well if the family was at least as diametrically distant as China. Cross, too,—why must he be driven beyond endurance by meeting Cross in the street, as if the fellow had his eye on him, had his eye on all the Tracys to make sure they were doing no harm

to Blighty? They never exchanged a word. Cross touched his hat most respectfully and Norris responded, every time more and more sulkily, but feeling, with an added irritation, that Cross understood the sulkiness, too, and would never lay it up against him. Norris slept very little now. He lay awake arranging interviews with Charles, wherein absurdly he found himself setting forth to his son, in an oratorical fashion, the duty of a man to the state, and sometimes even quoting to him whole paragraphs from his paper on the Politician. He concluded from this that he must sleep more, in this desultory musing, than he thought, and these were half waking dreams, because the man didn't live who could quote from an oratorical paper to a son he meant to hang. Step by step with his hatred of the whole job marched the determination to break his implied word to Helen. Let her blame him, let her even give him up, if her anger against him went so far. He wasn't going to let her in for partnership in the hideous thing. Sometimes when he woke in the morning after his wretched night he would take himself to task for having done nothing. "While I hesitate and balance good and bad," he would cry to that inward halting servitor of his, which was his will, "Charles is doing things. And they are undoubtedly all bad. He is tripping up good that evil may ride over it to the pit. He is slaying the innocent, and I am standing aside while they are slain. America, by staying out of the war, has killed her millions on the field. I, too, am killing through default, because I am staying out." And again he would feel that some day there would come a gigantic wave and bear him along with it and toss him down at Charles's door.

After one day of actual peace because he had made up his mind that the thing was too terrible to be expected of him,

he knew, without any previous screwing up of resolution, that the time had come. He put on his coat to go out and, hearing Emily in the dining-room, went through to her where she was humming a little song and laying out some napery in a way that hurt him inexpressibly, it made her a picture of such sweet untroubled uses. He went up to her and stopped her humming and she glanced at him with a smile.

"Going out?" she asked. "I'd like a breath. Want me to go?"

He almost caught at that, but he knew it was of no use. There was no reprieve now. The time had come.

"Can't," he said. "I heard John in his room. Call him and ask him to take you up the embankment. Emily!"

She had gone on with her work and she stopped, her hands hovering, and looked at him. The intent expression came into her face, the one that said she was on guard.

"Norris," she said, "what's wrong?"

Then he saw he was making a mistake and called on himself to buck up and, if he couldn't spare himself, at least spare her.

"Nothing, old girl," he said. "Only I'm sort of sentimental over you to-night. Give me a kiss."

She gave it and went with him to the outer door as if, he thought, she were seeing him off on a difficult errand, and he wondered how she would receive him when he came back, if he had to tell her he had slain her son. But, after all, would he come back? Might he not have to stick to Charles until the decisive thing he meant to demand of him was done? Might it not involve more than this night, and shouldn't he have gone prepared for indefinite absence? It would be difficult now to sneak his dressing bag away

from under Emily's eyes, and anyway things could be bought, and if they couldn't it would mean he was too desperately on the job to use them. As for giving Emily specious reasons, it would be more effective to do that by telephone, if he really found himself detained. Face to face with her, he felt the hopelessness of evading that clear gaze.

Emily was not, this time, so easily assuaged. When he had left her, she stood a moment in the hall thinking of him as he had been lately, as he was when Helen telephoned him and he had put her lightly off, but after it had seemed strangely shaken. She went to the telephone, called up Helen and put her question.

"Your daddy's out of sorts, Helen. Do you know anything about it?"

"Out of sorts?" asked Helen, and her voice thrilled with a quick alarm she was not, at that first minute, able to suppress. "He's not ill?"

"No, worried, upset. He's just gone out as if he were going to jump off the embankment. Helen, do you know anything about this? If you do, you must tell me. I'm really troubled, really, Helen. Do you see?"

Helen, she immediately knew, was deceiving her. For she only said:

"Don't you worry, dear. I fancy I know about it, and it's quite all right. And, mother, I'm going to send Jessie round to you. In the morning. Good-by."

Send Jessie round? what should Emily want with Jessie because her husband was on edge?

Norris went on to Charles's house, and on the way he was not apparently thinking at all. The thinking had been done. He only noted the aspect of the night and concluded what breeze there was appeared to be west. He

made a great point of that, stopping to hold up his hand and test it, as if the way of the wind could help or hinder him. Reaching the house, he gave himself no time to change his mind, but went up the steps and rang the bell. The door was at once opened by Charles himself, hat in hand. He looked greatly surprised and, his father plainly saw, questioning. Was the look apprehensive? was it threatening?

“Going out?” asked Norris. He stepped inside, put his hand on the door above Charles’s, still on the knob, and closed it. “Come back in, Charles. I want to see you.”

Norris took off his great coat and deposited it, with his hat, on the hall table. He turned toward the library and fronted there the smiling picture of Helen. That he wished he need not have seen. It brought a little catch in his throat. He made a mental note not to look at it again, and went on into the room. Charles took a step after him, but an indeterminate one, as if he could not possibly, even with the best will in the world and with every argument on the side of a gracious hospitality, accept his father’s presence. He laughed a little, apologetically.

“I can’t, dad,” he said. “Awfully sorry, but I’ve an appointment and I’m late for it now.”

“You’ll have to give it up,” said Norris, his tone as conclusive as the words. He pulled a chair directly under Helen’s picture and seated himself. Whatever reminders the picture might be sending forth, in the still argument of its appealing grace, whatever pleas to remember the past, to save, if it might be, the poor menaced future, it should be directed to Charles. As for himself, he could not bear it and go on. Charles stood for a moment looking at him, debating, with tight lips and frown-



ing brow. Then his face broke up into the beautiful smile his father knew and was startled to see — though he also sadly knew it was a weapon from Charles's armory — and went back into the hall to pull off his coat.

"All right," he said. "But I must telephone."

His father heard him. He got the number at once.

"That you?" he asked. "I was. Just starting. It's impossible. You understand? Do you understand? No. Possibly not to-night. Do you understand? Yes. That matter we talked over this afternoon. Do you understand? Say it yourself and I'll tell you yes or no." And, after a pause, "Yes, that's it, in the main. That's near enough."

He came back to his father, seated himself, and was at once all courteous attention.

"What is it, dad?" he asked solicitously. "Anything wrong?"

Norris felt no excitement now, only a tightening of the fibres of life within him, the strange secret forces that hold the body to its tasks. And he knew Charles was as tense as he. Charles had his cowardices. The man of hidden ways must have them. But at this moment his father felt, with a thrill of relief, Charles was not afraid; he had been able to gather himself up for combat, and there would be no shame to be remembered in that each had not fought as hard as he knew how. He began.

"The papers have come into my hands."

"Papers?" Charles repeated, with a sufficient amount of interest, not enough to be confirmatory nor too little for cordiality.

"The papers you were sending back to Germany. We won't waste time talking them over. You know what's in them. I know them by heart. They are, if the govern-



ment does its duty — ” here he paused, because the words of Cross that had stayed by him waking and sleeping, ever since he heard them, rose to his lips and insisted on finding way — “ they’re enough to hang you.”

He was looking straight at Charles and saw him sicken. Charles’s gaze did not deflect by a hair’s breadth from his, and he made no movement, even of the hands. But his face turned slowly to an ivory white. For a moment he did not speak. Then he said, and in a tone marked by merely a casual curiosity:

“ John turn them over to you? ”

“ No. John knows nothing about my having them. He had the bag for a few minutes, I understand, but not long enough for him to get any idea of what it contained. We’ll leave John out of this. He has nothing whatever to do with it. The thing is between you and me.”

“ Nothing whatever to do with it,” repeated Charles curiously. Yet he was perhaps not curious about John. He may have been giving himself time to conjecture what was to be required of him, and how he could reply. “ But do tell me, dad, just how — ”

“ No,” said Norris. “ I sha’n’t tell you anything. I merely tell you I have the papers. The manner of their coming into my hands isn’t your business.”

“ And you’ve really got them,” repeated Charles. “ Got ’em here? ”

“ To be precise, I have copies of them.”

“ Where are the originals? ”

A quick look leaped into his eyes, one his father had prayed he might not see there, the look of desperate fear.

“ The originals,” said Norris, “ are in the hands of another man who is waiting to use them until I’ve had a chance at you.”

Now something less than a shiver passed over Charles, over his hands and his eyes like a fleeting wind.

"He's giving me a chance," he said, "to get away?"

"No," said Norris, "you won't get away. He's giving me a chance to warn you to give yourself up."

Charles threw back his head and laughed at the surprise of it.

"Give myself up!" he repeated. "Do you know what that means?"

"Yes," said Norris, "I know."

And the words of Cross clanged, like a warning bell, through his mind.

"By God, you don't! or you wouldn't sit there like a judge on the bench and talk about giving myself up. It means exactly as much to you as it does to me, let me tell you — to you, to mother, to Helen. If you do for me you've done for yourself — for all of you. Your books, your sanctified New England reputation, they'll all go by the board. Don't you know they will?"

"Charles," said his father, "I've thought this over and over, too long perhaps. But I thought I had the right — perhaps I hadn't — to the one little decency of seeing you give yourself up, not of being dragged out of your house like a common criminal — as you are."

"You said you'd read the papers," said Charles. He was scowling heavily now, and his pale face had darkened with the mounting blood of rage. "I suppose you know then I'm not the only one implicated."

"They're all being watched," said his father. "They won't get away."

"But I'm the only one to have the privilege of giving myself up."

"Yes. Considering who they are, it didn't seem to me

the Government owed them any particular exemption or that I owed them anything. And whether I've a right to give you a chance to come out of it a little less despicable than the rest of 'em I don't know. Anyway, I've taken it."

"You say they're being watched. Am I being watched?"

"Yes," said Norris. Then he added, in a tone of extreme gentleness, "I'm watching you."

Perhaps the gentleness was admonitory. Perhaps it was unconsciously meant to remind Charles of old days when one was little and needed care and the other was giving it. But Charles laughed.

"You needn't laugh," said Norris quietly. "I'm not an old man, Charles. I'm not over weight. I'm in rather good condition, when it comes to that. I've got the full use of my legs. Also my fists. And I sha'n't leave you."

"Well, now," said Charles, conversationally, "just what do you propose?"

"I propose that you and I talk this thing over a little more fully — though not much — and that we go out together and you give yourself up."

"Dear me!" said Charles humorously. "The whole thing is so foreign to the family traditions that I don't believe I should know where to go. I assume it means spending the rest of the night in jail. What'll mother say?"

Norris did not answer.

"If that's the programme," Charles continued, "I certainly don't propose to hurry it. I most decidedly don't want to finish the night in a stone jug. Now, how about bail?"

"No," said Norris. "I shouldn't furnish it. Not in any circumstances. You'll give yourself up and you'll

take your own chances exactly as other criminals do. But — ” here his voice broke slightly, and Charles was quick to note it — “I shall be with you, you know, every inch of the way. I’ve got things arranged to leave home and go wherever you are sent, and to tell your mother in the quickest possible order where I’ve gone.”

“Father,” said Charles chaffingly, “are you sure you haven’t got a revolver in your pocket? That’s another dodge, you know, — blow the top of my head off? How’s that suit you?”

“I thought of that,” said Norris unmoved, “but I concluded it went with my novel writing traditions and I’d get down to brass tacks. I was told, not long ago, that that’s what life is — brass tacks. No, I simply expect you to do the plain, decent thing — the only one decent thing there is left — and take the consequences.”

They sat in silence for a moment, and then Charles broke out in the most complete revulsion, the frankest possible surrender.

“Well, dad, you’re a great old sport and you’ve got me. It’s no use to pretend you haven’t. But give me a minute, dad. Let me see if I can’t convince you I’m not every bit as bad as I seem.”

“I don’t believe you could convince me,” said Norris soberly. He felt the weariness now of what his task had cost him and passed a hand slowly across his eyes. “We needn’t go into it any deeper. You’re not obliged to tell me things. I simply shouldn’t believe you if you did.”

“But see here,” said Charles boyishly, “you’ve got to give me a chance: not to get back, you know, but to get back with you. That’s all I ask now. So you can tell mum, you know, mum and Helen. And you’d like to remember it yourself. This is an awful stunt you’re doing.

Don't you s'pose I know it is? After it's all over, you'll want something you can hang on to. For I can tell you what'll happen. You'll simply go all to pieces."

Hearing the frank boyish voice pleading with him, Norris could at last have broken into the old cry of fatherhood: "Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son." But his face remained unmoved and he did not answer, while Charles went on:

"It's all true. Every blessed thing you've said is right, dead right. The only point where you're not right is that you don't know all this stopped weeks ago, stopped altogether. I'd had those fellows here up to that time. I'd done over the billiard room, for a safe meeting place. Did you know that?"

"Yes," said Norris, "I knew it."

"You did?" said Charles admiringly. "Aren't you the old fox! Do you know, dad, I'm rather afraid of you. If I'd been as afraid when I was eighteen, you might have made something of me. Now I'm going to tell you what happened. I had a safe put into the billiard room and a switchboard here in the house so we could speak all over the place if anything happened. But that was all months ago, and now — you just come up with me and see whether it looks like a conspirator's den."

He rose, in alert invitation.

"I don't care anything about the billiard room," said Norris. But he did get up, for he had a sudden idea that Charles was about to escape him. And he gave himself a quick inward admonition to remember that, though an old boy, he could sprint and he could spar. On the stairs Charles turned and looked down upon him, and this was the look and the tone of Charles when he was not having his own way.

"If you know so much," he said, "I suppose you know that damned mountebank sent me his fool clothes for an added insult."

But Norris looked up at him so obviously bewildered that Charles's face cleared and he said grudgingly:

"Oh, well, it's evident you don't," and went on.

The billiard room was at the top of the last flight of stairs. The door stood open and Charles stepped in and turned on the light. Norris also went in and looked about him. The room was in a perfection of order emphasizing its bareness to the point of desolation. Not a pen or inkstand was on the big table and not even a scrap of paper in the basket. The chairs were set in attitudes of stiff conventional usage about the room.

"The typewriter," said Charles, "has gone down to my office at the *Voice*. The safe —" The door of the safe was open and he swung it wider. "Actually, dad, the conspirators have simply cut stick and gone, repented of their ways and left no trace behind. Yes, that book-case — it's out here because, when we were using the safe, the book-case stood in front of it. I must have it moved back against the wall."

"Well," said Norris, with a glance about him, his mind really on Cross, aided by gutters, doing impossible feats from the next room, "I can see you've cleaned up your traces here. That's all, isn't it? We may as well go down."

"Yes," said Charles, turning to the door.

Like a shadow he slipped through and shut it behind him. And Norris, the instant too late, heard the lock click and knew his agonies had been fruitless and he was done.



## XXXV

CHARLES ran down the stairs, but at the head of the last flight he stopped short at a voice from the back of the hall. It was intermittently scolding and, in terms unintelligible to him, invoking Elsa, who stood there, with the cage at her feet, as its beloved treasure and heart's dearest and other melting epithets indigenous to German poetry. Polly was in great form to-night. The short spin in a taxi had evidently joggled his brain cells to a surprising activity of linguistic chaos. Charles came on instantly after he had recognized the voice, devoting an adjective or two to Polly on the way, and Elsa left the cage on the floor and hurried forward to meet him. She had on her street dress and was pulling off her gloves. Her face was set in an extreme intentness and his eyes met hers with the same look.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Did you call the meeting off?" he returned.

"Yes, the instant you telephoned. Who's here?"

"How did you get in?"

Their questions were meeting with scant space for answers.

"By the back way. The way we said. Who was here?"

"My father."

"Your father? has he gone?"

He preceded her into the room where Elsa was conscious of Helen's picture looking down on them, and threw himself into a chair. The courtesies of life were forgotten



between them now. Elsa did not sit. She was too taut with her anxieties.

"Well? well?" she prompted, standing before him and drawing her gloves through straining hands. "Has he gone? I heard voices. If he's not gone, where is he?"

Charles told her curtly what his father had come to say and where his father was now. She listened in silence, her eyes upon him so intently that they seemed to be implacable inquisitors dragging out of him what he had to say, as if he spoke because they bade him and not through his own will. She walked away from him and turned back.

"There isn't," she said, "you told me yesterday, a scrap of evidence in this house."

He was looking at her in a steady intensity like her own. Elsa came near liking him then. He was not going to flinch, she saw, now at the last, and she adored courage. What if this empty husk of a man, having the one greatest quality still left in him, were her makeshift of a man after all, something left her from the flotsam time was throwing up to clog her feet?

"No," he said, "not a scrap of evidence. The servants are gone, as we decided. That fellow and his wife come in by day to put the house in order."

"Then," said she, "what are we waiting for?"

"Nothing — if you're ready. Got your things packed?"

"Yes. Sophie comes in by the day, you know. She's paid ahead. If she comes to-morrow and finds the apartment empty, she's simply to go away again."

"And the *Voice*?"

"That's all right. You're to telephone Schmidt — Smith — we'd better remember that even between ourselves — and he'll take it on to-morrow without any fuss, and the

next issue'll be a red hot one clamoring for war. Telephone him now. Then get a taxi and we'll go round to my house and pick up my things."

Charles got up to go to the telephone and stopped, laughing out savagely to himself. He was thinking Brennan's old cartoon would go into that number of the paper, the one of the cock and the lion and the kangaroo drilling for war and the United States greedily picking up corn. He had laid it out for such an issue, with some of Bailey's militant verse and Finch's prose.

"What is it?" she asked. "What are you laughing at?"

But he stood listening.

"Hark!" he said. For there was the sound of a key in the lock of the outer door. "Hark!" he said again under his breath, and Helen came in.

She looked a little pale and rather serious, but was in no sense excited. So composed was she that one might have said she expected to find Elsa there and that the scene was set precisely as she had known it would be. She wore a long coat, and this she took off at once and dropped it on a chair. At that moment the parrot, disturbed by the cold breeze from the opening of the door, called from the hall:

"Law! law! what a fuss."

Curiously enough Charles and Elsa, who were both used to the creature, started at that, but Helen gave no sign of having heard. Her breeding was so complete, Charles sardonically thought, with an unwilling admiration, that she was ignoring the devil in the bird with an undiminished ease.

"I've been waiting for your father to come out," said Helen, about to seat herself, and then, with the air of

dispensing hospitality, pausing to indicate a chair to Elsa, who, however, did not obey the gracious hand.

"Waiting?" said Charles.

"Just across the street. I didn't want to come in until he'd gone."

"So you knew he was here?" Charles demanded, a thick frown settling on his face.

"I knew he was coming sometime, but not to-night. To-night I just guessed it. Where is your father?"

"He's gone," said Charles. "He went the back way."

"The back way?" She bent her brows upon him. She was plainly puzzled. "Why should your father go out the back way?"

"Because," said Charles, "if you must know, I'd been telling him some of the things that have been going on here — I suppose you know what I mean?"

"Yes," said Helen, "I know."

"I took him over the house and showed him some of our precautions in case there was a raid. And when I got him down to the back yard and let him see how easy it was to make a get-away he said, being there, he'd go along, not come back through the house again. That's all."

"Charles," said Helen, "what does your father want you to do?"

For a moment or two there was silence in the room, and Charles, looking down at the floor, was conscious that the eyes of the two women were fixed upon him, Elsa's in an inexorable calm, bidding him remember, count every heart-beat because the fortunes of them both hung upon this one minute. And Helen, he knew from his last glance at her, looked strangely like the vision he had seen in Elsa's room. That did momentarily disturb him. He was afraid he was going to lose composure. He must not, he thought,

get jumpy. But his mind was made up. He shot a swift look into the eyes of Elsa. If it didn't put her wise, he told himself, she was less clever than he thought. Then he turned to Helen with his beautiful smile.

"My dearest," he said, "dad asks me to give myself up."

"Yes," said Helen breathlessly, "I knew he would. And you're going to do it."

"Yes," said Charles, "I'm going to do it. That's what we were talking about when you came in. Mrs. Davenport has been a sort of secretary of the gang I've got myself in with, and we were taking account of stock. She hasn't been concerned in it, you understand, but she's found them out and she's found me out. She knows so little of the whole business that there's no doubt of her going scot free. And that's what you'd want, by Jove! a woman like you, Helen. You'd want another woman to go free."

Helen looked at Elsa and remembered the day Elsa had told her she was in the Service and on Charles's track. Was it true? If it was true, was it possible the woman had led him to his undoing? and what if she had? by whatever steps he had come before the seat of judgment, he was there, and the way seemed no more important than any other inevitable path to the grave of hope and happiness. Elsa was a long distance outside her mind already; but now she thrust her on to farthest space and turned to Charles as if he and she were alone in the house together, in the world.

"And," said Charles, paraphrasing the old password, "Helen, you've come home to me."

"Yes," she said, the tears now on her lashes, "I've come home."

Nothing of the old fondness would she deny him if it would make him the stronger for his task. If they were to live together, the knowledge of his alien nature would stand between them, bidding her shudder at the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice. But what solace he needed for this unguessed trial she would give him generously. Now he was saying, and in the voice that searched always at the inmost heart of her:

"I'm going to ask you not to stay. Not now, at least. Mrs. Davenport," he interpolated, in a concise authority, "you'd better be making out the pay schedule of the reporters on the *Voice*."

So Elsa went to the desk in the rear of the room, drew a sheet of paper before her and did perfunctory things with a pen, not looking up. Charles continued, always in his voice of blessing:

"Helen, you've got to understand. I can't bear to have you with me now, to remind me of what I've had, make me realize what I've lost. You don't want to weaken me, do you? You want to put backbone into me?"

"Yes," said Helen, "I want you to be strong."

"Then you'll do exactly what I ask you now. You don't want me to break down and blubber, do you? No! Then this is what you do. You go straight home again and wait till morning. Father's coming back here at half past eight. You come, too, and we'll all three go out together, and when you've left me he'll take you home again."

"You're not willing," she hesitated, "to have me go up to my room and wait there? You needn't think of me. I wouldn't speak to you. I sha'n't go to bed, wherever I am. Let me stay, Charles. Let me be near."

"Do you think I could bear it?" he asked, in a moving

voice. "In this house — with everything to remind us — Helen, go back there and come to me in the morning and I'll bless you as long as I live."

"Very well," she said.

She got up and he helped her on with her coat. She looked once into his face and wished his mother could see him. The former things had passed away. He was clarified, trembling with earnestness, with what might well be consecration to his awful task.

"Mrs. Davenport will help me through with my accounts," he said, smiling now. "That's a matter of half an hour or so. Then she'll go. Maybe she'll take a train out of town. I fancy she'd better not be round here for a while. And Helen — " He was holding her hand and leading her to the door. The touch of his hand was like ice, and her compassion welled again for him — "Helen, don't telephone the house. I'm horribly afraid of mother's getting hold of this."

"But she'll have to, in the end," Helen said, stopping in the hall to look at him and consider this.

"Yes, after it's over, when the thing's done, decently, you know, in order, and she's got something to hang on to, think I had some courage at the last. And don't answer any telephone calls to-night. Don't let Jessie."

"But," said Helen, "something might happen. It might be you."

"Nothing is going to happen till to-morrow morning. And then you'll be here and dad'll be with you. Promise, dear."

"Yes," said she. "I promise."

Now he was with her on the step outside. A man stood on the pavement across the street, but as Charles glanced at him he lounged along.



"You're sure you don't mind being out alone?" Charles asked her, going with her down the steps.

"No," said she. "I don't mind. Good night."

And though he could not see her face, he knew the tears had flooded it.

"I'll watch you," he called after her, in a voice of such good cheer that she wondered, letting her sobs come now because he could not hear them, if he really understood how terrible his future had to be. She was amazed at his high courage, and so proud of him.

But Charles did not watch her, except intermittently. He regarded the man on the other side of the street who was walking briskly in the direction Helen went, but as if he had a purpose now, and minding it, and in so definite a way there seemed nothing to fear from him, and he shut the door and hurried back into the room where Elsa was standing in the middle of the floor. She had drawn on her gloves and held a letter, sealed and stamped.

"Telephone for the taxi," he said, "for God's sake. And while it's coming, telephone Schmidt about the *Voice*. I'll get my bag."

He ran noiselessly up the stairs and, with no delay, appeared again. Elsa had switched off the light in the library. But before she did it she stood for a long minute and looked up at Helen's smiling face. "Too bad!" she said aloud. Then recognition of the unreasoning cruelty of life pressed upon her with such weight, that the words were not enough, and she added, "Too damned bad." It was not so much that she was sorry for Helen or sorry for herself, as that a sense of the defacement of things came upon her, the travesty that lay in evil. It was the revulsion brought by country stillnesses or whispering woods, and her soul lamented for a moment



over the courts of light it had left behind. Charles found her standing in the hall, and suddenly remembered what it was grotesque to him he should have forgotten.

"Good Lord!" he said, "what's to be done about him? He's up there in the billiard room."

She gave the letter in her hand a little flourish.

"I've seen to that," she said. "We'll mail it at the station."

"What is it? Who's it to?"

"Your Helen. I've told her he's here and she'll let him out. And I've left her Polly."

"That damned bird?" exploded Charles. "I won't have it — running him into decent people's houses, talking German all over the place. There's the taxi. You go on out and I'll fix him."

"No," said Elsa, "you go out. Polly isn't going to have his neck wrung to-night."

Nor would she leave the house until Charles had taken his bag and gone forth, cursing under his breath. Then she went to Polly, lifted his cage to the hall table out of the draft, put in her finger and "scratched a poll."

"Good-bye, old dear," she said. "Chances are you never'll see your Henrietta any more."

And as the door closed behind her she heard the parrot invoking her again as his beloved treasure and then, as if in derision of all the sentimentalism of the human heart, chuckling, "O law! law! what a fuss!"

## XXXVI

WHEN NORRIS heard the click of the lock he stood there a moment, smiling a little and thinking, after his old humorous habit: "It's a joke on me." Then he put his hands in his pockets, walked back and forth through the room and finally drew a chair to the table and sat down. Why he had to sit at the table he did not reason; but when he was there he knew. It was that he might set his elbows on it and lean his head in his hands. Sitting there, he did some of the bitterest, most ironic thinking of his life. At first he thought how this interview with Charles had looked to him in anticipation, how tragic an import it had borne, and how he had even, at moments of rushing emotion over his son, believed he might break his own habit of New England calm, the thin ice of whimsy and indifference that glassed the actual depths of him, and surge into supplication and entreaty. He smiled again, remembering how he had once even foreseen himself making a dramatic appeal involving the old sword hanging over the fireplace at Grasslands and adjuring Charles to be true to the traditions of his race. But the interview had passed off like the realistic first act of a modern comedy, though nothing had been built up in it toward the climax of the play. Simply he had been decoyed into a room — and this, too, was a little like the stage, because it was one of the hoariest expedients — and the lock clicked on him. And all because he had, even in the slightest measure, trusted Charles to behave like other men, and had omitted for an instant to carry out his part in the drama of cat

and mouse. He would have said, if he had foreseen this moment, that his heart would have been bitter within him because this was only an intensifying of the failure attendant on his whole life. But it was not so. He took it like the soldier who, having enlisted, must meet the fortunes of war, kill if he can, be killed if he must. He had simply made the choice of giving up his son to justice because no sacrifice was too great for national safety and his own honor, and his son had snatched the sacrifice from the altar and given it to the dogs. For Charles was unquestionably on his way to concealment and somehow the continued service of things evil.

Sitting there, Norris became more and more conscious of the gods: for there seemed now more than the One God who permits these lesser ones to be, but holds Himself afar off both from them and from us, in His clemency and the immovableness of His just wrath. There is the god which is justice and the god which is love — and he found no weakness of tolerance in the swift feet of this last god — and there is, greatest of all, the god which is the human will. And he saw that there is nothing greater than the will of man when it wills good and nothing so swift on the road leading down to the pit as the soul that wills evil. What is that great fire which is made by the perpetual feeding of things evil? What is it warming? what light is it going, in the end, to bring? And then, leaving the communion of the lesser gods, he worshipped the One God in his heart and sat up resolute and calm.

He looked about the room as if he had slept and come awake, and as his eyes ran over the windows and their heavy curtains, he remembered Cross and how he had done his acrobatic feat of listening, and it occurred to him he was not too heavy a man to do a little fine work himself

by the aid of gutters. Could he get out of this last window at the right and crawl in at the dormer of the little room which had been Cross's egress? He distinctly remembered seeing the door of the little room, as he and Charles came up the stairs, and it was open. He had thought of Cross, at the time. He got up and went to the right hand window, drew the curtains aside, threw up the window and looked out. There was the dormer at his right. There was the trusty gutter three feet below and the incline to it was gentle. Instantly he decided not to spend the night in the billiard room. He was pleasingly excited at the thought of an unconventional exit. Somehow he seemed to be vindicating himself slightly if, after the foolishness of being locked up, he could show the plain sense of getting out. He put his leg over the sill, holding to the sash above him, and then drew out the other leg and tested the gutter with one foot. But he had no real doubt of it. He remembered Cross's quiet asseveration that it had been reënforced. He edged his way along without difficulty, reached the dormer, put his right hand on the side to support himself and, with his left, pushed at the window. It was locked. Had he anything to break the glass, anything but his bare fist? Nothing, it seemed, but the pencil in his pocket. He got it out and smashed through the middle pane, and, with the ill-will of things mechanical, the pencil made only an ineffectual hole. He shut his eyes, with a thought of splinters, and stabbed at it again and again, to the sound of falling glass. "What's that?" he heard from a window somewhere below him. Another window was put up. So he thrust his hand through the jagged aperture, unlocked the window, threw it up, drew himself in and closed it again. He went out into the dark hall, found the banisters and groped his

way down. For the entire hall was dark from top to bottom, and when he found the button on the ground floor and turned on the light a voice commented angrily: "O law! law! what a fuss!"

Then he heard a key in the lock of the front door and, so natural is it for human nature to believe, for one instant he thought Charles had repented and come back. The door opened and a man stepped in. It was Cross. Norris was in that instant of assault by the warmer emotions so taken aback that his face must have changed, in some manner, for Cross said reassuringly:

"It's all right, sir. It's only me. Why, sir," he added, with a quick dart at his old helpfulness, "you've cut your hand. I'll run up to Mr. Charles's room and get a handkerchief and tie it up."

Norris stood there in a sick indifference while Cross ran up the stairs and came back with bandages and pins — not Charles's handkerchiefs after all, but a roll of dressings from Helen's medicine closet.

"If you'll just come back here to the pantry where I can sponge it off," he said, and Norris followed him and stood in silence while Cross worked deftly, encasing the hand in a bandage absolutely professional. And while he worked, he talked.

"You see, sir, I knew you came in here early in the evening and I didn't see you go out again. So I concluded you were here still. And I thought I'd better drop in and make sure. I've got a key, you know."

"Mr. Charles has gone," said Norris, in a voice that sounded indifferent and remote.

He wondered if it was the sight of the blood that was making him sick, and then concluded this was only the sickness of life.

"Yes, sir," said Cross cheerfully. "I saw them off."

"Saw them off? Saw who off?"

He felt himself coming awake again.

"Mr. Charles, sir, and Mrs. Davenport."

"Saw them off where?"

"From the South Station. Turn your hand a little this way, sir. Yes, that's right. Yes, sir. You see I've been outside here most of the evening. I saw you come in. Oh, yes, I told you that. I saw madam come and go away again——"

"Helen?" repeated Norris thickly to himself. Had Helen then, in spite of him, been in it?

"I went up the street a little way to see she got home all right," said Cross, apparently more absorbed in persuading the bandage round the thumb than in the telling of his tale. "I'd hardly come back when a taxi drove up and Mr. Charles and Mrs. Davenport came out and got in. I had a car of my own round the corner here. So we followed them, my man and I, over to Mrs. Davenport's, where they got her luggage. I shouldn't have said that sort of a lady could travel with so little luggage, sir. Amazing! and I went with them to the South Station and hung round there till they took their train. Yes, sir, they're gone, sir, quite gone."

He spoke, Norris idly thought, as if they might have been expected to go by instalments and that it was an inexpressible mercy they had gone intact, "quite gone."

"But where?" he asked stupidly, "where have they gone?"

"New York, sir. After that I couldn't say. There, sir, I think we might consider that finished."

He cleared up the traces of his work, always deftly and in haste, and Norris stood and watched him absently.



Finally he asked the question that was struggling from the confusion of his tired mind.

“But, Cross, you said he was by far the most dangerous of the men working against the war, you implied — you said —” Here he stopped.

“Yes, sir,” said Cross briskly. “I did mean to have him hauled up. But then, sir, there’s madam. When I think of madam — and don’t you think yourself, sir, it’s just as well to feel he’s getting off to New York, even if it is with the lady, sir — oh, I don’t stand for the lady, sir, any more than you do, sir — I think of madam there. But what must be, must. And it isn’t beyond belief, sir, Mr. Charles has got his warning and he’ll go and sin no more.”

Cross uttered this last with quite a flourish, as if he felt a scriptural phrase might be expected to clinch his argument. But he did not tell Norris, nor did he ever tell him, that the man whom he referred to so meagrely as his man, waiting in the car for him, had also gone to New York, and that, on arriving, Charles and Mrs. Davenport would walk into his custody. And furthermore Cross knew that if all went well, if justice worked according to the stern formula just men expected of her, nothing would be heard of the two for a long time. They would be swallowed up, put, in some fashion, where they could do no harm to the foundations of organized life, and Norris Tracy need not remember he had conspired against his son. For, so far as Norris was concerned, the whole issue would be blurred by circumstance. Cross, being at this time the only one who knew with what a weariness of will Norris Tracy had hung to the task of rendering his son harmless to the state, was the one who was bent on protecting him from his own remorse.



"Now, sir," said he briskly, "I've got to clean up things a little. Why, sir, you really did lose quite an amount, and we don't want blood stains on the stairs. Nobody knows who'll be in here next. Yes, sir, if you please, just sit down there in the hall chair. I'll turn on this light and make it a little more cheerful, sir."

The light flashing out in the library seemed to Norris to have rushed in for the one purpose of summoning Helen's face from the dark, and perhaps to Cross, also, for he paused an instant and looked up at it before turning to his task upstairs. And as Norris saw his face the instant after, he felt it would not have been surprising if the man had crossed himself. So Norris sat there and looked at Helen and also regarded life which was her background, and soon Cross appeared, after his brisk activities, sought about for Norris's coat and hat and helped him on with them and they turned to go. And the parrot, waked again, yelled irascibly: "Henrietta! Henri — etta," in his oratorical exactness making two words of it.

Norris paused.

"Whose bird is that?" he inquired. "They never had a parrot, to my knowledge."

"No, sir," said Cross, so pleasantly explanatory that it almost seemed he commiserated Charles for not being fortunate enough to possess so rare a treasure, "I'm quite sure it wasn't Mr. Charles's. In fact, I know it wasn't."

"Well," said Norris, still hesitating, "it's got to be looked after, I suppose. Hadn't I better take the infernal thing home with me?"

It was Polly's dark destiny to inspire the same sentiments everywhere, to evoke according adjectives: from all save one, his Henrietta.

"I should think it would be a most excellent plan," said Cross. "Especially as we don't know who'll be in here next. One moment, sir. They're very delicate, I believe, very susceptible to cold."

He disappeared into the next room and came back with a heavy travelling rug, and in this he enveloped Polly's cage. Then he turned off the lights and, carrying Polly with a steady hand, ran down the steps after Norris and walked on with him. They said good-night, at Norris's door, and there halted an instant, each with thoughts that met and hesitated and actually could not be spoken. Cross was full of commiseration and Norris of gratitude for it. But what could be said? Norris put out his hand and Cross took it and as quickly let it go.

"Good night, sir," he said again.

Norris let himself in, and his first glance at the lighted front room gave him Emily sitting there, very comfortable, it seemed, with a book. She evidently meant to give the impression of being simply too cosy to go to bed. He put down the cage on the floor and walked in to her. She looked up with a sort of absent-minded surprise, as if she had not expected him so soon. But that, he knew, was the art of it. She was not going to nag him by the shadow of an implication it was for him she waited. At this later day of his own greater needs, he was beginning to find her out. But he had his minute of exasperation. It was when he saw that the book she laid down on the sofa beside her — and with no mark in it at all — was one of his. He picked it up, and threw it, with a careful aim, to the very end of the next room.

"Emily," said he, "you are a pearl among women, but if you ask me how I've cut my hand and why I've come home with a parrot in the middle of the night, I'll cram you

into a burlap bag and chuck you into the Bosphorus. And see how you'll like that."

Emily was gazing at him in what seemed merely a conventional interest.

"Where is the parrot?" she inquired.

"Out there in the hall, done up in a rug."

"Don't you think," said she, "I'd better put him in the dining room? It's warmer there."

She went into the hall, took off the rug, noting mentally that it had Helen's initials embroidered in the corner, spoke cheerfully and quite professionally to Polly, and carried him off into the dining room. There she wasted no time over him, but came back, told Norris there were sandwiches and beer out there on the table, and said she'd leave him now and run up to bed. And he must be sure to turn off. So they had no words or domestic queer-nesses; only Norris, who slept a sleep fathoms deep, concluded in the morning, from her look, that she hadn't slept at all. Had she? he asked her.

"Oh, yes," said Emily, the keeper of her own ways, "I guess so."

After the three had finished their late breakfast, they lingered at the table while Norris concluded a tale he had embarked on midway in the meal when he became rather acutely conscious of John's interest in his bandaged hand. He knew he had got to account for the hand and for the parrot, or suffer to the end of time the intermittent heckling of John who, in the ways of domestic serenity, was not his mother's son. In the parrot John was taking a fearful joy, quite unable to let Polly alone, clucking at him, adjuring him to speak, getting up to thrust a coaxing finger through the bars and prudently withdrawing it. For Polly lost no time in sidling toward it with

so vicious an eye and such fell purpose in it as John found he had not the nerve to meet. Polly, in his day, had seen all sorts of men and had concluded that there was nothing to this human brood, except, indeed, his Henrietta.

Norris amazed himself by the sense of exhilaration he could pump up, this morning. He had meant to do a deed of justice that would cost him all his earthly peace, and he had failed. Was he glad he had failed? No, for he could scarcely face the misery of believing Charles was still at large, poisoning the good earth under the slime of treachery and ill-will. His physical uplift, he thought, was due solely to the memory of having climbed out of a window, broken another window and escaped ignominious confinement. Not only must he account to John for the queerness of last night, but he did wish he might deflect Emily a little from her own particular track of surmise: for he had no doubt she saw Charles, through those extraordinary lenses of hers, directed on the family obliquities, as clearly as he did. So he branched out into the story of the parrot, and presently found he was taking an artistic satisfaction in it. There was a sailor connected with it. He had met the sailor on the way to the club, and the sailor had invited him down to his ship, a fruit steamer, twice torpedoed, in from the Azores, and they'd had supper on board.

"What d'you drink?" inquired John, his gaze glued to Polly's cage where, as if bent on unholy fascination, the creature clawed and sidled.

"Mead," said Norris mildly. "That was with the first course. Then there was poppy and mandragora. But that didn't begin to get in its work till I got home. And the sailor — his name was five-fingered Jack — drank like a fish —"

"I thought," said Emily innocently, "we all had five fingers. Don't we count the thumb?"

"Yes," said Norris, "that was the queer part of it. I gathered he'd been living with a tribe that had an even number on each hand."

Then he told how he and the sailor swore blood brotherhood, and he gave the sailor a nickel for a pocket piece, and the sailor gave him the parrot, and then got quarrelsome and tried to chuck him through a port-hole, and, in the scrimmage, of course they both caught up anything they could find, tumblers and knives and warming-pans and that was how he cut his hand—

"See here, dad," said John, tearing his delighted gaze from Polly long enough to regard his father shrewdly, because this was so very thin a bluff he suspected something under it, "you must have come home well pickled and you haven't got over it yet. D'you see him, mum, last night?"

"Yes," said Emily, with composure. "I happened to be up."

"How'd he look?"

"Much as usual," said Emily. "I believe I'd better go round to that shop where they have parrots and ask what they feed them on."

"Well," said John, "if I turned in such an Odyssey of a new Arabian Night you'd say I'd been on a particularly complicated and highly colored bat. Hullo! there she is."

"Who?" asked Emily.

"Jessie, of course."

John was out of his chair and stood an instant to listen, the color flooding his face.

"It's Helen," said Norris, also getting up and chilled to

the heart. No poor dribble of nonsense was going to serve him now.

They came in, Helen haggard in spite of the freshness of the outdoor air, and Jessie reflecting her. Helen was grief itself. Its marks were about her mouth and eyes, and Jessie's face wore an anxiety deepened into fright. Helen did not stop for a look at Emily or for one perfunctory word of greeting. She went straight to Norris and he put out both hands to her. But she did not give him hers. It was not, it could be seen, because she was repulsing him, but because she simply did not see they needed to greet each other in any way. Hardly did she take him in at all, except as the one figure wherein lay hope of her enlightenment.

"He is gone," she said.

"Yes," said Norris. "He went last night."

Now Emily got up and came to Norris, standing a little behind him and watching Helen. John drew Jessie back a step from Helen's side, so that he could get her hand in his, and remind her that, though love might be dead before them, here in their two hands they were keeping it alive. Jessie caught her breath, and he could feel her trembling.

"He asked me," Helen went on, "to go home last night and come to him this morning. And I went. And the house was empty. Even that parrot in the hall —"

Here Polly, less bird than wanton spirit, John learned suddenly, shrieked from the cage, "Henri — etta!" and Helen started, gave a quick "oh" of repugnance and went on:

"I searched all over the house. There was nobody there. Then I went home. And there was a letter. It had come while I was gone."



She thrust it at him and Norris read the two lines in silence.

"She wants you to let me out," he said. "Well, I got out myself. And she asks you to take the parrot. And the parrot's here."

"I want to know," Helen went on steadily, "this one thing. Was he taken away from there — or did he go?"

"He went," said Norris gravely. Again he had the sense of being lifted and borne along on a great wave of obligation: to tell these things, to tell them quietly, and to carry his family with him into some calm beyond the storm. He turned to his wife and took her hand in his. So he stood, holding it as John held Jessie's; and Helen, not from any lack in their deep love for her, but because that other love had failed her, was alone.

"Emily," he said, "we're talking about Charles. He has done things against the law. I told you that before. Helen and I both knew he was likely to be arrested. But he has not been arrested. He has got away."

Emily's hand in his gave a sudden start, as if a hand might have a heart of its own and leap to quickened beating; but she said, with a calmness that amazed him, even from her:

"You'd rather have him punished."

"Would you?" Norris asked her, because it seemed as if the question in return might hurt her less.

Emily hesitated a moment. Then she answered:

"Yes, Norris. If you think he must be punished, I think so, too."

Helen, in this moment, was waiting to lay her last doubt.

"Father" — she was using that word now — "did he go alone?"

"No," said Norris, not hesitating. "She went with him."

"Then," said Helen, "I can forgive you for not telling me you were going to him last night."

She snatched up the two hands, Norris's with Emily's in its clasp, kissed them both and held them a moment in her own. Then she dropped them and ran out of the room, and they heard her footsteps flying up the stairs. There was a breath of easement from them all.

"She's gone up to grandsir," Norris said, and Emily gave a little inarticulate sound of assent.

"Mother," said John, in a tone he tried to soften into some likeness to his own voice, it sounded so thick and strange, "here's Jessie. Jessie and I — can't you say something to Jessie, mother?"

But while Emily, who needed no more than that, left Norris and came forward to draw Jessie up to her, John dropped Jessie's hand and threw himself into a chair at the table, pushed back his cup and plate, laid his arms on the table and dropped his head upon them.

"Oh, damn Charles Tracy!" he cried, in that strangled voice. "Damn him! damn him!"

And now, he savagely knew, he was, not in anger but from something the family only could mysteriously understand, crying over Charles.

Grandsir was in bed, his breakfast tray on the table beside him, the morning paper littered over the coverlet. He was listening. In the whiteness of his bed, he looked older and more delicate than in daytime dress. But the frail fabric of his being did not call upon the eye for pity. It cried aloud that this dissolving mortality was, through its very weakness, proving itself the spirit's friend; for when its ruin should be accomplished, then the grateful

spirit could wing forth. Helen, in her one blinded glance at him thought she had never seen anything so triumphantly strong and stern and glorious as grandsir's face. Yet it was not now she thought it: only gathered up the look of it as one might snatch a leaf in running, and find out afterward its healing grace. Now she felt only her haste to get to him. She sank on her knees by the bedside and put her cheek against his hand.

"Has he gone?" grandsir asked her, in the firm, curt tone of a man at his best.

"Yes," said Helen. "How did you know?"

"I knew it last night," said grandsir. "You can say I dreamt it, if you like. Helen, he's death. He belongs to the things that rot and mix with the earth and sink away; and queer enough it is, but out of their rotting maybe something blooms at last. You be the thing that blooms, Helen. You're life, just as he is death. Promise me you'll be the thing that blooms."

"Yes," said she faintly, clinging to his hand and feeling as if she had the very tree of life upholding her. And then again she asked the old question, younger than none since Pilate's: "Grandsir, what is love?"

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